

The Autobiography & Maxims

of

Master Han Shan

1546-1623

Text Translated

by

Upasaka Richard Cheung

and Paraphrased by

Rev. Chuan Yuan (Ming Zhen) Shakya, OHY

Publication of the printed text of this work, which is freely distributed at Hsu Yun Temple, Honolulu, Hawaii, was made possible by the generous donations of Mr. and Mrs. Wing Kam Chang, of Phoenix, Arizona.

A production of the Zen Buddhist Order of Hsu Yun

<http://www.hsuyun.org>

info@hsuyun.org

Acknowledgment

It is my great pleasure to express my gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Wing Kam Chang of Phoenix, Arizona, whose generosity and dedication to our Buddhist Dharma has enabled us to translate, publish and to freely distribute Han Shan's autobiography at Hsu Yun Temple, Honolulu, Hawaii. Through their kindness our Internet ministry is now able to bring this important work to readers around the world. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Chang.

Mr. Chang was born into a highly respected Buddhist family: his parents being Upasaka Ming Ming, who were followers of our Venerable Master Hsu Yun in China. Mr. Chang's entire family has a long and respected association with Buddhism; and it is a great honor for all of us to enjoy their unfailing support.

Through the efforts of Mr. Chang and his ancestors many important Buddhist scriptures have been translated and distributed in many countries around the world. I can remember the pleasure I felt when reading a hand-written copy of the Lotus Sutra which his father had made for others to read and study. The Chang family is also responsible for translating and publishing Patriarch Hui Neng's Platform Sutra into English as well as many other ancient Chinese texts.

The heart of Buddhism reposes in the good character of the Buddha's followers. In all this world there are few Buddhists whose devotion can be said to equal that of the Chang family. Certainly there are none who surpass it.

We all owe Mr. and Mrs. Wing Kam Chang and their entire family a debt of gratitude which we can never adequately repay.

Jy Din Sakya, Abbot
Hsu Yun Temple
42 Kawanana Place
Honolulu, Hawaii.

Acknowledgment by the translator

All kinds of people, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, nobles or ordinary people, and even emperors or their families, have been, throughout history, influenced by the teachings of the Dharma. The literary works of the great masters and patriarchs of Buddhism, who devoted their lives to spreading the Dharma, are valuable guides to us all. From their biographies, we learn not only the details of their search for truth and of their practice of Buddhism, but also of their character and determination in achieving their goals and vows.

Master Han Shan was one of the four greatest monks in Ming Dynasty (1368-1643) in China. He was a great patriarch of Zen Buddhism. During his life of practicing Zen, he attained enlightenment and various visionary states. He helped and guided his followers to understand many sutras by lecturing and writing commentaries on them, for example, the lectures of *The Hua Yan Xuan Tan*; *Straight Talk on the Heart Sutra*; *The commentary of The Avatamsaka Sutra*; *The Lankavatara Sutra*; *The Thorough Meaning of Surangama Sutra*; and many others. He was also a well educated scholar in Classical Chinese literature with commentaries on *Chun Qiu Zuo's Doctrine of the Mind*; *Zhao Lun* and others.

If this book enables a reader, whether or not he already includes himself in Buddhist ranks, to share in the great joy of our religion and to learn even a little more about our religion's illustrious history, this present work has attained its objective.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Rev. Chuan Yuan (Ming Zhen) Shakya who spent much time and effort in effecting a paraphrase of my translation of the original Chinese into English. I also like to thank Ven. Jy-Din Sakya who gave me guidance and explanation whenever I needed during the work. Lastly, I express my appreciation to the good course that has been done by Mr. and Mrs. Wing K. Chang whose generosity is responsible for bringing this important work to the world.

Richard Cheung
Honolulu, December 1993

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MAXIMS OF CHAN MASTER HAN SHAN

INTRODUCTION

To a traveler on the Chan Path, as it is to a traveler on any arduous journey, hostelrys, sign posts, and an occasional helping hand are indispensable. Especially when the way is difficult, a traveler requires a safe place to rest just as he needs to know his location. Should he stumble, he'll need an outstretched hand. Should he find himself hopelessly lost, he'll require directions from someone who well knows the way.

In Chan, every wayfarer knows that he can find refuge in the Buddhist Dharma. There is always room for him in that most comfortable of Inns. And reflection upon his improving sense of well-being—that peace, joy, and freedom he increasingly feels—will reliably locate his position on the steep ascent.

But what about those critical times when he finds himself fallen or lost? Who will arrive to extend a helping hand and be his companion until he is healed and steady on his feet? When he is confused, who will be there to point him in the right direction? When he is lost, whose footprints will appear to lead him back to the True Path?

To a traveler on the Chan Path, that helping hand, that good advice and companionship are provided by Master Han Shan. Those trusted footprints are his, too.

How, the modern traveler may ask, can the autobiography of a 16th century peripatetic Chinese Master possibly be relevant in today's jet-age society? He will laugh to think that in Han Shan's day, railroad trains, now quaint and obsolete, were not to be invented until centuries in the future.

And he who customarily relies upon the clear, precise recordings of Silicon Valley technology will surely doubt that he can find anything useful in the faded brushstroke recollections of a fellow who called himself Han Shan . . . "Silly Mountain."

But the human soul does not submit to scientific scrutiny. The journey to Nirvana is not made by space shuttle or the Union Pacific. Today, as it was in Siddhartha's day, progress on the Path is gained by the acquisition of love and understanding and humility. Han Shan helps us to acquire these treasures.

Who among us has never chafed at the dictates of his parents, at that exercise of parental authority which, in the name of "doing what was best in the long run" forced him to commit to a course he did not wish to follow? Before that "long run" occurs, years of resentment intervene. Anyone who still bears even a residue of such resentment will surely benefit from Han Shan's experience. Sadly he relates that as a happy thriving boy, he was told that he must be sent away to a distant school "to receive the best education possible."

Separation from all he knew and loved—especially from his beloved mother—was for him unthinkable, and so he protested grievously, repeatedly refusing to board the ferry that would carry him away. Imagine the pain and chagrin he felt when his mother personally ordered him thrown into the river, turned her back to his cries and walked away, leaving him no choice but to turn to others for help. His love for her turned into contempt and the kind of bitterness that can only be cured by indifference. Imagine the pain he felt when as a mature adult he learned that in the days and years following his departure, his mother would go regularly to the river's edge and sit and weep because she loved and missed him so.

Han Shan is justly regarded as one of China's greatest poets. Wherever he went people clamored for his writings. Those who succeeded in getting him to compose a verse for them treated the lines like a trophy. But Han Shan knew all too well that the proficiency and the insights that gained him such acclaim were the products of that "best possible education" his mother had paid so dearly to obtain for him, and his anger, contempt and indifference melted into shame. For love of him she had sacrificed her own happiness, and he had rewarded her great love with a wretched stone of silence. Can we not all learn from this experience?

Who among us has never been accused of an offense of which he is innocent? And if he has thus far escaped, who can fail to fear the possibility of tomorrow's accusations? If he cannot prove his innocence, how will he bear his punishment? Will he become as detestable as the lie, or will he retain his dignity and continue to pursue his goals despite the obstacles such calumny presents? Han Shan was falsely accused of a crime, and the record of his personal conduct will serve as an exemplar for anyone who suffers such misfortune.

Who among us has never had his mind so swollen with self-righteous pride that it lost all capacity to perceive the truth? As Han Shan's intellectual powers began to rise, his ego inflated as if keeping pace. He became so arrogant that he nearly severed his relationship with his best friend because that friend did not accord him proper courtesies. We will remember the "dressing down" given him by a spiritual superior, a chastisement that brought him to his senses.

On every page the text teems with valuable lessons. The maxims, too, are marvelously instructive because, being so sharp and penetrating, they come quickly to the core of all our confusions. The light of Han Shan's genius then shines in and leads us forward in

our quest for spiritual clarity.

In the words of Han Shan's 11th maxim:

“Put a fish on land and he will remember the ocean until he dies. Put a bird in a cage, yet he will not forget the sky. Each remains homesick for his true home, the place where his nature has decreed that he should be.

“Man is born in the state of innocence. His original nature is love and grace and purity. Yet he emigrates so casually without even a thought of his old home. Is this not sadder than the fishes and the birds?”

After reading Han Shan, we are not so casual about our emigrations.

Reverend Chuan Yuan (Ming Zhen) Shakyā

November 25, 1994

Hsu Yun Temple

Honolulu, Hawaii

The Autobiography of Master Han Shan (1546-1623)

The First Year (1546-7)

I was born into the Cai family, my father being the honorable Yen Gao Cai.

I'll tell you about my birth. My mother, whose maiden name was Hong, had been devoted to Guan Yin all her life. One night, early in the year 1546, my mother dreamed that white-robed Guan Yin came to our house leading a little boy by the hand. My mother was so filled with joy as she welcomed them that she knelt and hugged the little boy. Right after she had this dream, she discovered she was pregnant! And so, on the twelfth day of the tenth month of that year—on the 5th of November—I came into the world. My body was covered with a thick, white caul which not only was a sign of good fortune but resembled—or so my mother thought—Guan Yin's white robe.

The Second Year (1547-8)

When I was a year old, I caught a very bad cold which nearly killed me. My mother prayed to Guan Yin, promising that if I recovered she would allow me to become a monk. Of course, I did recover. So my mother registered my name at Long Life Temple. After she did this, she gave me the nickname, "Heshang," which means Buddhist Monk.

The Third Year (1548-9)

I wasn't what you'd call an energetic child. I used to sit alone, never caring to play with other children. My grandfather often said, "This kid is like a wooden stake."

The Seventh Year (1552-3)

When it was time for me to get an education, my parents sent me to a neighborhood school. Nothing philosophical occurred to me until one day when an uncle of mine died. Though I loved my uncle very much, I hadn't known he was even sick. When I returned from school and found him stretched out so quietly on the bed, I didn't know what to think. My mother played a 'mind-game' trick on me:

"Your uncle is sleeping," she said. "You can wake him up."

I called and shouted at him trying to get him to wake up, but he wouldn't respond.

My aunt wasn't amused. "What's wrong with you?" she snarled. "Can't you see he's gone!"

I couldn't understand how he could be gone when he was still right there. My mother explained, "Your uncle is dead. His body is here, but his spirit is gone."

And so I wondered where the spirit goes when the body dies. Soon after this, another aunt of mine gave birth to a boy. My mother and I went to visit them. When I saw the baby, I asked, "Where did this baby come from?"

"He came from your aunt's belly," she answered.

This was very mysterious. I asked, "How did he get into Aunt's belly?"

My mother patted my face and said, "You silly boy! Where did you come from? From my belly! Don't you know how you got into there?"

I didn't know how I had managed to do that, and so I was really puzzled. This is what started me wondering about birth and death. To be honest, I've never really understood it.

The Eighth Year (1553-4)

When I was eight years old I was sent to a more advanced school that was located on the other side of the river from where we lived. It was necessary for me to board at a relative's house. This was a truly painful time of my life. My mother knew how important education was and how miserable my future would be without a proper education. But I was a child. I didn't understand. All I knew was that I missed my mother. I was so homesick that I couldn't concentrate on my studies. My mother tried to force me to get over my attachment to her by not allowing me to come home more than once each month. Well, during one visit I decided not to go back to school. I refused to go to the dock to get the ferry back to the other side of the river. My mother got angry. She started hitting me with a stick, chasing me to the dock. But I still refused to get on the boat. This got her so mad that she took me by the hair and threw me into the river. Then she went straight home without so much as a look back at me. Fortunately, my grandmother saw the whole thing and got someone to pull me out of the river. Saved, I was happily sent home.

My mother wasn't glad to see me. She screamed at my grandmother, "Do you want him to become a failure? If he doesn't do well in school he'll be useless. I would rather see him drown now than to let him stay here with me and become a failure!" My grandmother accused my mother of being hard-hearted. But my mother ignored the accusation and picked up another stick. With it she drove me back to the dock.

This time when I got on the boat my heart changed. I believed that my mother was cruel and that she didn't love me at all. I stopped missing her and got over my homesickness completely. It wasn't until years later that I learned how often my mother would go to the dock and sit there crying for me.

The Ninth Year (1554-5)

I transferred to a monastery school. Everyday I listened to the monks recite *The Sutra of Guan Yin Avalokitesvara*, the Bodhisattva who could deliver the world from suffering. Hearing it made me so happy that I begged for a copy of it so that I could learn to chant it, too. A monk gave me a copy and I soon learned it by heart. I knew how much my mother worshipped Guan Yin, how she burned incense and prayed to Guan Yin every day, but I had never heard her chant to Guan Yin. So one day I asked my mother, "Do you know that our Bodhisattva has a special sutra?"

My mother was surprised. "I didn't know that," she said. I then recited the sutra for her. She was absolutely delighted. "Where did you learn this?" she asked, adding, "You chant just like an old monk!"

The Tenth Year (1555-6)

I was no more scholarly than I was sociable and energetic. I was tired of schoolwork and couldn't see the slightest use in studying. My mother had to force me to do my homework. She tried hard to motivate me. Whenever I complained, she'd give me a pep talk, assuring me that if I got an education I could become a government official. I thought about this possibility.

"An official of what rank?" I asked.

"Of any rank," she answered, "from the lowest to the highest. Why, if a person is talented he can become Prime Minister."

"And after he becomes Prime Minister, then what?" I asked.

She said, "Then he can retire!"

I thought I could win this argument, "Well," I said, "what is the point of working so hard all my life to attain a high position if I'm only going to quit when I reach the goal?"

"I wouldn't worry about attaining a high position if I were you," she countered. "You don't have that much talent."

After deflating my ego, she tried to steer me to the religious life, saying, "You might be able to become a wandering monk." I was curious. "What is a wandering monk? Is it good to be one?" She told me that wandering monks are disciples of Buddha who travel all over the country receiving offerings from people. She also said that these monks were truly free. I thought, Hmmm. Free and supported by gifts.

"That suits me," I announced.

"If that's what you think," she said, "then you don't have the right spirit."

"What is the right spirit?"

"Men who try to become Buddhas or Patriarchs are more than itinerant scholars. They're holy men who are dedicated to the Dharma."

I thought about this. "I could be holy," I said, "but would that be enough for you to let me leave home to become a wandering monk?" "I'll tell you what," she replied. "If you become holy, I'll let you become a monk."

From that day on, I kept the thought of becoming a monk securely in mind.

The Eleventh Year (1556-7)

One day several monks came to our house. They carried gourds and bamboo hats and looked strange to me.

I asked my mother, "Who are these men?"

"They are wandering monks," she answered.

At last I had a look at wandering monks. I watched them lay their belongings beside a tree then come and ask for offerings of food.

My mother treated them with great respect. "Venerable Ones, please sit down," she said as she immediately got up and busied herself preparing tea and a meal for them.

After they finished their meal they picked up their belongings and prepared to leave. Just as they began to raise their hands in a gesture of gratitude, my mother stopped them saying, “Venerable Sirs, please don’t give me any thanks.” Immediately the monks turned and left.

I thought the monks were impolite. “They should have said ‘thank you’ anyway,” I said.

“No,” my mother said. “If they persisted in thanking me, then I would have had to accept their thanks and then, you see, I would have gained no merit. My gift would have been given in exchange for thanks instead of being given freely, for love of the Dharma.” So I saw immediately that what I had thought was impolite conduct was actually the greatest kindness. I was then able to understand why monks were so highly respected. After that, I really desired to become a monk and regretted that I didn’t yet have the necessary holiness to become one.

The Twelfth Year (1557-8)

The things of the world didn’t interest me at all. When I found out that my father was looking for a wife for me, I immediately stopped him. I didn’t want to get married.

One day I learned from a monk who came from Nanjing about a certain Xi Lin, a very virtuous man, who was Abbot of Bao En Temple. I wanted to learn about the Dharma and I wanted him to teach me. But naturally when I told my father that I wanted to leave home and go to Nanjing to study Buddhism, my father refused to allow it. So I talked to my mother and she talked to my father.

She said, “We raised him in the expectation that he would achieve his own goals. This is his goal, so let’s allow him to pursue it.” She won my father over and in the tenth month of the year I went to Bao En Temple to study.

When Abbot Xi Lin saw me, he seemed delighted. This boy is different! I think it would be a pity if he were to become a common man.” Abbot Xi Lin took me to see Master Wu Ji who was giving Dharma talks in the Tripitaka Hall of the temple. There I met the great scholar Zhao Da Zhou who patted my head and said, “This boy will be a teacher of men and of heavens.” Then he asked me, “Which would you rather be, an official or a Buddha?”

I immediately replied, “A Buddha.”

“This boy is special,” Zhao said. “We should teach him well. I think he’ll be a great man one day,” he graciously added.

When I attended the Dharma lectures, I didn’t always grasp the technical meaning of what was said, but intuitively I understood it. And a wonderful feeling would come over me as I listened. It was as if the Dharma was a song I once knew but had forgotten, and now I was hearing snatches of melody, a few bars here and there that I could recognize—though not yet put together to reconstruct the song.

I also found my first real brother in the Dharma: Xue Lang. At thirteen, he was a year older than I. He had just left home to become a monk of Master Wu Ji and was the first member to enter the religious life so young. He came with Master Wu Ji who was the first Master to give Dharma talks in our area.

The Thirteenth Year (1558-9)

First, the Abbot’s Master selected a monk named Jun to be my tutor. Jun was an educated man of very good character. He began my instruction with *The Lotus Sutra*, and in less than four months I was able to recite it by heart.

The Fourteenth Year (1559-60)

I continued my studies with Jun, learning by heart many other popular sutras. This, of course, pleased the Abbot’s Master. “Anyone who learns so well should be given careful guidance,” he said. And so, another good teacher was found for me.

The Fifteenth Year (1560-1)

At the Master’s request, my teacher began my instruction with the classical literature required for the scholar’s examination. As soon as I showed that I could handle this subject, I was additionally given *The Four Books* to study. I was sick all year.

The Sixteenth Year (1561-2)

In this year I finished studying *The Four Books* and was able to recite it front to back without missing a word.

The Seventeenth Year (1562-3)

While demonstrating my proficiency in *The Four Books*, I studied *The Five Classics*, *The Sage’s Books*, history ancient literature and poetical composition. I began to write poems and articles that were actually appreciated by my classmates.

The Eighteenth Year (1563-4)

My eighteenth year was not a good one. First of all, the chief examiner’s attendant taught only Daoism. Not terribly Daoist himself, he’d require students to flutter around him, parroting his lines of Daoist wisdom. If they didn’t sing along, they didn’t get

promoted. I thought the whole business shameful and wanted to abandon my studies. Fortunately, I was also sick that year and didn't have to go to class.

The Nineteenth Year (1564-5)

Finding a shortcut to success was the only thing my classmates and I ever thought about. For me, that shortcut meant going to the capital to take the scholar's examination; I therefore set about making the necessary applications. It so happened that while I was doing this, Master Yun Gu, he of the Right Dharma Eye, began to make regular visits to Qi Xia Mountain Monastery. It was my privilege to go there to serve him during his month-long visits.

When Master Yun Gu learned that I was going to take the scholar's examination, he feared that I might leave monastic life, so he sat me down and had a long, man-to-man talk with me. He brilliantly argued the case for my becoming a monk and following Chan's Path. Describing the mind and all its wonders, he assured me that by abandoning worldly desire and practicing Chan, I, too, could realize these wondrous states of mind. One by one, he told me about the lives of past Masters and of their great accomplishments.

I then came upon a copy of *The Sayings of Zhong Feng* and started reading it. Immediately, I knew that I had found my true path. The book was an absolute delight! I was in complete agreement with every point it made. With no hesitation I decided to become a monk and join the Sangha. I asked Abbot's Master to have my head shaved, burned all my books and writings, and devoted myself to practicing what little Chan I knew.

Having neither training manual nor teacher, I didn't know much about the various Chan techniques, so I had to content myself with the basic practice of concentrating my mind on Amitabha Buddha while repeating his name. Day and night without interruption I recited his sacred name. Then, one night I dreamed of Amitabha Buddha. He was standing on air just high enough off the ground for me to look directly at his feet when I knelt before him. Slowly I looked up and when I saw his radiant face I was filled with love for him. Then I prayed to Guan Yin Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, his two attending bodhisattvas, and immediately they appeared in half-size. After that, whenever I prayed, these three of the Western Paradise—the Buddha Amitabha, Guan Yin Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta—would appear to me. Thus I knew that my practice would be successful.

That winter I received full ordination under Master Wu Ji.

It was an exciting time. The hall I ordained in, which was actually the Chan Meditation Hall, was also used for Dharma talks, and since Master Wu Ji had accepted an invitation to come and lecture on *The Hua Yen Hsuen Tan*, which was Master Qing Liang's commentary on *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, I stayed on to attend his lectures.

When Master Wu Ji got to the chapter, "The Ten Wonder Gateways of Ocean Symbol Samadhi," I suddenly understood how all things were connected in the Dharmadhatu, the Spiritual Ground of Reality. This understanding was so clear that I decided to call myself "Cheng Yin" which means "clear impression" because I was highly impressed by the character of Master Qing Liang.

Though certain that I had awakened to this profound meaning, I nevertheless went to Master Wu Ji and asked him to test my understanding. This he did. "Do you know," asked Master Wu Ji, "why this mountain is called 'Qing Liang?'"

I didn't know so he explained that the mountain top was covered with ice in winter and that even in summer snow continued to fall there. It was a place which did not feel the sun's heat.

"Be like Qing Liang Mountain," he said, "and always hold its presence in your mind."

From that day on, no matter where I was or what was I doing, the snowy white scenery of Qing Liang Mountain filled my vision. In a real sense, I continued to live on that mountain. Little else interested me. I was detaching myself from the rest of the world.

The Twentieth Year (1565-6)

On the sixteenth day of the first month of this year the Abbot Master Xi Lin passed away. Only nine days earlier he had dressed himself and had gone to visit each monk at the monastery in order to say goodbye. Everyone was shocked. Then, three days after this farewell, he instructed everyone on what to do after his death. He was ill at the time but he refused to take any medicine, saying, "When it's time to leave what's the use of taking medicine?" He assembled his disciples and all recited the Buddha Amitabha's name for five days and nights. Then, holding his rosary close to his chest, Abbot Master died. He had been the abbot of Bao En Temple for thirty years. His favorite sutra was *The Diamond Sutra* and this he had recited every day of his life.

Of course, there was the matter of succession. Two years earlier, on New Year's Eve, Abbot Master had gathered all his disciples together saying, "I am eighty-three years old and soon will leave this earth. Though I have over eighty disciples, none of them will be able to take my place." We were all puzzled by this. Abbot Master then patted my back and said, "I wish I could see him grow up, but that's not possible now. Yes, although he's young, he's as able as an adult. After my death, despite his youth, he should be consulted in matters concerning the monastery."

Everyone was astonished when, two months after his death, on the eighteenth day of the third month, the Abbott's rooms caught fire and burned down. Now we understood his meaning. No one could replace him.

In the tenth month of this year Master Yun Gu organized a Chan Meditation meeting at Tian Chi Temple. Fifty-three well-known masters agreed to come and though I was no master, Master Yun Gu urged me to attend. He also urged the abbot of Bao En Temple to allow me to participate. Fortunately, the abbot agreed and I was able to join the group.

I was, after all, only a beginner and, as a beginner, I was having trouble controlling my mind. Carrying an incense stick in a gesture of respect, I called on Master Yun Gu and asked him to instruct me. He told that for the next three months I should work exclusively on trying to solve the Kung An, “Who is repeating the Buddha’s name?”

I threw myself into this task a little too strenuously. At the outset, no doubt because of the strain, a large red abscess formed on my back. It worried the Master so much that I feared he would prevent me from continuing with my new meditation. I put on my robes and went to pray before the shrine of Monastery Guardian Wei Tuo. “Oh Protector of the Temple,” I said, “no doubt I am guilty of a serious sin and must suffer this infirmity in order to atone for it. I don’t ask you to relieve me of paying my debt but merely to postpone payment until I’m able to complete the three-month meditation period. To show my good faith I will recite *The Avatamsaka Sutra* ten times.”

It was after midnight when, exhausted, I was finally able to fall asleep on the meditation mat. When I awakened I forgot all about my abscess. Master didn’t. At daybreak he asked me about my ailment and I assured him that I was fine. He insisted on examining the abscess for himself and to everyone’s surprise, it had completely subsided. Thus I was able to continue the Kung An meditation which I entered so single-mindedly that for the following three months I seemed to be living a dream. I didn’t notice the assembly’s presence. I didn’t even know what was going on. When I went into a crowded marketplace, I was unaware of a single person. I’m sure the other monks thought that what I had achieved was merely a loss of sanity, but I knew that I had attained complete concentration.

The success of Chan in the eastern provinces south of the Yangtse River was largely due to the efforts of Master Yun Gu. Before he organized the Chan meeting, it had been the custom for monks to wear ordinary, bright colored clothing. After the Chan meeting, however, I resolved to change the custom. I stopped wearing laymen’s clothes and wore instead a Sangha robe. People gave me strange looks when they saw me.

My Twenty-First Year (1566-7)

In the year after the Chan meeting, on the twenty-eighth day of the second month, disaster struck Bao En Temple. During a violent thunderstorm one afternoon, at five o’clock, the stupa was hit by lightning and the shrine caught fire. By seven o’clock the whole place had burned down. In just two hours, one hundred and forty structures—rooms, halls, painted corridors—were reduced to ashes.

The Emperor held the monastery’s administrators accountable for the loss, and an order was given to the civilian authorities to arrest the new young abbot and eighteen senior monks. They were carted off to jail some twenty Chinese miles away. Most of the remaining monks, not wishing to join them and having no place to stay anyway, quickly fled. The few monks who elected to stay on at the ruins were so distraught they didn’t know what to do. They had lost their home and their leaders.

Remembering the old abbot’s good opinion of me and how he had instructed that I should be consulted in administrative matters, I sought to be worthy of his trust and began immediately to try to get things organized. Prisoners depend on family and friends for their meals, and so I gave first priority to getting food to the abbot and the senior monks. Everyday, for three straight months, we made up a basket of salted vegetables which I then carried to the jail. Other monks and friends also helped; and between our combined efforts, the abbot and monks were able to endure their imprisonment. After those three months, they were finally released.

But the young abbot, no doubt broken by the experience, soon died, leaving no one to look after the temple and the community.

When the old abbot had died, he left no money. Even his funeral expenses had to be paid with borrowed funds. I therefore gave second priority to paying off the temple’s old, outstanding debts. After all, if we didn’t pay the creditors they’d seize the temple’s lands and remaining property and that would be the end of this religious community. Between our hard work and the generosity of others, I was able to raise enough money to pay the old debts and to support, for a while at least, the monks who remained in residence.

Xue Lang, my Dharma brother and dear friend, and I decided to rebuild Bao En Temple. Since we had no money, this did not promise to be an easy task. We also knew that, more than money, our plan would require patience, effort, wisdom and integrity; and so, we vowed to remain faithful to the Dharma as we awaited the proper opportunity to begin.

I then decided to make a pilgrimage. The first part of it began that winter when I went to Tian Jie Temple and listened to Master Wu Ji lecture on *The Lotus Sutra*.

I thought that for the next leg of my journey I should have a companion, so I searched my companions at Tian Jie Temple for

one suitable for the trip. I found no one.

Then one day it occurred to me that the latrines were always particularly clean. Only an extraordinary man can perform such a disagreeable task consistently well. I learned the identity of the sanitation monk and went to call on him, but, claiming illness, he declined to see me. This was a bit mysterious since I could see that every morning the latrines had been meticulously cleaned. When was he working?

One night I purposely stayed up and went to the latrines to watch the cleaning operation. I spied in vain. The toilets had already been scrubbed. Since everything was dry I supposed that they had been cleaned earlier, probably during the evening meditation session.

Before I could solve the mystery, the sanitation monk ceased working in the latrine. The toilets became filthy. I inquired of the administrator the whereabouts of the monk, and he told me that he was very ill and had been put to bed in the guest room. I went immediately to see him and found him in terrible condition, jaundiced and dyspeptic. I asked him how he was and he answered, "My health isn't worth much even when it's good. When it's bad, it's really awful."

"How so?" I asked.

"Well," he confided, "good health or bad, my appetite remains intact so that when I see and smell food, I really want to eat. But when I'm in bad health, my body can't tolerate the food, as you can see."

I thought sweet cakes might be easier for him to digest so I bought him some. I asked him his name and he replied, "Miao Feng. I'm a native of Fuzhou."

I invited him to accompany me on my journey and gave him time to think about my proposal, but a few days later he was gone without a word. I supposed that he didn't like being disturbed by me. I regretted his departure.

The Twenty-second Year (1567-8)

My journey put off a while longer, I returned to attend to the affairs of Bao En Temple. At my recommendation, Master Yun Gu became abbot of Bao En. We hoped he would increase the dwindling community.

The debt problem was not so easily solved. I had borrowed one thousand gold coins to defray the expenses of partial restoration and, of course, for maintaining the sangha. The sangha could not pay the debt and I had to arrange to have its repayment spread out over a three-year period.

The civil authorities had ordered the temple to open a free school. Since I was asked to teach, I had to re-study classical literature and become a scholar again. We had more than one hundred fifty students.

The Twenty-third, fourth, and fifth Years (1568-71)

With the school and faculty finally organized at Bao En, I was able to earn money teaching at other monastery schools. I taught at Gao Zuo Temple for one year and at Jin Shan monastery for two.

The Twenty-sixth Year (1571-72)

I returned to Bao En Temple and, being able to pay off all the remaining debts, was at last able to make my long awaited pilgrimage. Xue Lang and I set out for Lu Shan Mountain.

When we reached Nan Kang we heard that tigers were prowling about and that it wasn't safe to go up the mountain. This seemed like a good reason to press on to Ji An.

At Ji An we went to Zing Yuan where we found a temple in ruins. The monks who still resided there had let their hair grow. Once again I was seized with desire to rebuild a temple. Feeling like an expert now, I immediately spoke to the authorities, gained their approval, selected about forty young, strong monks, shaved their heads, and instructed them in the hard work of temple restoration. By the summer, I was able to leave Qing Yuan in capable hands.

That winter, in the eleventh month, I decided to continue my pilgrimage. I got my rice bowl ready and announced that I was heading north. Xue Lang protested. It made no sense to him to go north in winter. But that, I told him, was the whole point. Were I to go southeast to the beautiful provinces that he suggested, I'd be going on a vacation, not a pilgrimage. I said to him, "Look, comfortable living soon becomes a bad habit. Without something to struggle against, you get lazy." He still didn't see the merits of going 'the hard way,' but I knew that I needed adversity to overcome if I was ever going to gain real control of my mind. So I picked up my bowl and left.

The Twenty-seventh Year (1572-3)

I couldn't get any farther than Yang Zhou. A heavy snowfall had prevented me from going on. Sick and tired, I went into the marketplace to beg, but no matter how pitifully I begged, nobody would give me anything. The other mendicant monks who were also stuck there fared no better. What was wrong with the people of Yang Zhou? I thought about this long and hard. Then an

answer occurred to me. I took all the money I had left and, gathering the monks together, I treated all of them to dinner at a restaurant. It was a way of ‘priming the pump.’ If we wanted to tap the town’s prosperity, we had to invest a little in it. Now, ‘speaking their language,’ we were shown more generosity by the townspeople when we begged. I was rather proud of myself for having figured out this strategy. It was a simple solution but it was more forceful than a thousand temple bells.

My begging bowl and my robe! They were all I needed. Having solved the food problem, I owed my independence to my warm robe. In this garment’s honor, I composed the following poem:

You wrap around and shape yourself to suit me,
Imprisoning my heart.
I don’t want to escape.
Inside you, I’ve got everything I need.
Do you know how beautiful you are?
Your graceful sleeves flutter in the breeze
Like a wild swan’s wings.
And when I let you hang unbound
And the wind comes and fills you,
You’re a billowing cloud
That lifts me up to sport with dragons.
Contained in you, I’m free.
I can climb cold mountains and linger at the summit.
Silk would send me down. Not you.
You say, “Stay and make yourself at home!”
A warm cabin in the drifting snows.

Mid-year, in the seventh month, I entered Beijing where I could find neither food nor lodging. All day I searched in vain, and finally, in the evening, I was given a little meal at a tea shop in Tai Ping and permission to spend the night at Yi Jiao Temple at He Cao. By next morning an official, Wang Bo Yu, had learned of my arrival. He sent for me and, out of respect for his brother, Wang Zhong Yan, who was a member of Yi Jiao, permitted me to stay on at the monastery for another ten days.

After this visit, I called on Dharma Master Maha Zhong and followed him to Xi Shan Temple to listen to his talk on *The Miao Zong Chao*, a commentary on Amitabha Buddha’s *Meditation Sutra*. After the lecture, Dharma Master Maha Zhong invited me to stay for the winter and attend his lectures on *The Lotus Sutra* and *The Vijnana-Matra*. I was delighted to accept. I also asked the Master if he would be kind enough to instruct me in formal logic—in particular, the syllogism.

I was a little lonely, I suppose, and missed my old friends. Everywhere I went I was either hoping to meet up with Miao Feng or I was remembering Xue Lang whom I had left behind. I even wrote a poem about Xue Lang.

Then, in the eleventh month, Miao Feng suddenly arrived and called on me. His hair and beard were long and his clothing was coarse. True to his mysterious ways, he claimed to be a salt merchant when he asked to see me. When he entered my room, he asked, “Do you recognize me?”

It took me a moment until I recognized the eyes of the sanitation monk Tian Chi Temple. “I do, indeed,” I said.

“There’s been quite a change in my appearance!” he said.

I countered, “Yes, but your Original Face hasn’t changed at all.” We both laughed at this exchange and sat there a while, quiet and happy.

Miao Feng was staying at Long Hua Temple. When he visited me again the next day, we sat and talked for the entire evening. He explained that he had let his hair and beard grow because he had been living high on a mountain for a long time. At the foot of the mountain there was an old ruined temple which a benefactor, Prince Shan Yin, had decided to restore. The Prince had requested Miao Feng to come to Xi Shan Temple to collect *The Tripitaka* Buddhist scriptures for it. He asked me why I had come and I answered, “Why, to look for you, of course. . . and to see the capital.” I also told him that I was seeking advice from various masters on how I could best get control of my wandering thoughts.

As our night-long conversation ended, Miao Feng confided, “After we parted, I always thought about you. I was afraid that we’d never meet again. Now that we’re together again, I’ll gladly go with you to beg for food.” Then he added, “I’ll even guard you from dogs.”

“Sure,” I said smiling. It was daybreak.

My calls on various masters didn’t profit me much. I made obeisance to Master Pian Yong and prayed to him to show me a Chan practice. He responded by staring blankly at me.

I called on Master Shao Yan and begged the same of him. He replied by asking, “Where did you come from?”

I replied, “From the South.”

“Do you remember the road that led you here?”

“I didn’t bother much about it once I had traveled it,” I answered. “Just so you always keep moving . . . keep departing,” he said.

I bowed and stood there waiting for his guidance but he only said a few words about the transcendental doctrine. Then I took his advice and left. It would take years before I understood that by ‘always departing’ he meant that I shouldn’t become attached to any place . . . or any one.

The Twenty-eighth Year (1573-4)

In the first month, I went to Wu Tai Shan. I bought a copy of *The Life Story of Qing Liang* and visited the places mentioned in the text. I found Han Shan (Silly) Mountain so serene and strangely beautiful that I decided to appropriate its name for myself. The mountain inspired me to compose the following poem:

This Silly Mountain doesn’t go around aping people,
Playing the clown, society’s fool.
It sits here alone, contented in solitude, perfect in peace.
I should be so silly.

Because I couldn’t endure the snow season’s bitter cold, I returned to the capital. From there I proceeded eastward, all the way begging for food. At Qian Xiang Gu (Thousand Statue Peak) I encountered a monk who was sitting silently in mediation. I didn’t disturb him with questions. I just stayed with him, collecting firewood, begging for food, and carrying water for us both. In this way the summer passed.

Official Wang kept tract of me. He sent me a letter saying that he feared I’d starve in the eastern suburbs. He wanted me to return. In autumn, I went, because Ou Zhen Bo of Ling Nan (Guangdong), who was one of the state’s most learned scholars, wished to see me as soon as possible. I had never met Ou Zhen Bo but I had corresponded with him a few years earlier.

The Twenty-ninth Year (1574-5)

In the spring of my twenty-ninth year I visited the capital’s Western Hill where the most eminent scholars, the two brothers Wang Feng Zhou and Wang Lin Zhou; Ou Zhen Bo of Ling Nan; and the two brothers, Wang Bo Yu and Wang Zhong Yan, were gathered.

Feeling very cocky, very full of myself, and spoiling for an intellectual fight, I went to visit Wang Feng Zhou. I assumed that because I was young he’d think he could handle me easily. I sat there smugly letting him wait on me as though I were an honored guest and he privileged to be my host. Then, when he was reckless enough to attempt to teach me a little poetry, I stared at him and got up and left without a word.

Not surprisingly, he wasn’t pleased by my conduct and told his younger brother, Wang Lin Zhou, about the incident. The next day, Wang Lin Zhou came to see me.

“Last night,” he said, “my brother had his Eye put out.”

“Do you have that Eye?” I asked.

“I think I have,” he said graciously, “now that I have met you.” We both laughed heartily and talked into the night.

When he returned to his brother he was kind enough to say, “Brother, you lost to a modern-day Vimalakirti.” He even sent me a poem he wrote about me.

His praise fed my arrogance and puffed me up even more. One day, Wang Zhong Yan, with whom I was staying, watched me as I read a volume of the *Zuo Chuan*. He said to me, “You’re talented and, since you have literary inclinations, you ought to take up writing as a career. You’ll make a name for yourself. My brother is an authority on contemporary literature. He can help you.”

Humble as ever, I sneered and spat, saying, “I’m waiting for the time when your older brother comes to me on his knees begging me to tell him why Bodhidharma came from the West.”

The younger Wang wasn’t too happy with my attitude. He related our conversation to his brother who more or less said, “If this guy’s talents are as big as his mouth, he’ll definitely become successor to Da Wei and Zhong Feng.” Then he added, “Literature may not be good enough for him, but until he gets control of his mind, he won’t find anything better.”

One day the older Wang took a fan on which I had written the lines,

Time is one wing of a gnat. Space is the other.

The universe is the hair of a horse.

He showed the fan to his younger brother. “These,” he said with kind approval, “are not the lines of a fatuous literary monk.”

On one occasion a town official invited Miao Feng and me to a vegetarian banquet. He was worried about the decline of our Chan sect. “Your knowledge and bearing should bring you great success, but not of course if you keep wandering around.”

I told him I wanted to learn from all the different enlightened masters. Not only was I seeking enlightenment but I needed help in stopping my disturbing thoughts. “I’m not just a wanderer, even though,” I conceded, “I am getting ready to leave soon.”

“That’s all right,” he said, “but I wish I could think of someone to direct you to, someone who could be your teacher. I also don’t like to think of you going off alone, and without Miao Feng you’ll have no friend to travel with.”

I corrected him. “Miao Feng and I will be traveling together. Yes, long ago, when we first met, we agreed to be companions in our Chan practice. Then we were separated and after years of searching for each other we finally met here unexpectedly.”

“Well,” said the official happily, “this is wonderful news. If both of you travel together, I’ll be glad to help you with money.”

Glad to hear this, I counted on his support for the journey I expected to make with Miao Feng.

But then one day the official came to me telling me to hurry and come say goodbye to Miao Feng. Goodbye? Miao Feng hadn’t told me he was leaving! But evidently, he had received *The Tripitaka* he had originally come for, and so he simply decided to depart. I was hurt and felt betrayed and thought that I deserved better treatment than this.

The official tried to get me to hurry, but I refused, showing my indignation. “I see no reason to hurry,” I said coldly. Then the official looked me in the eye. “Look,” he said, “I know you want to be your own man, but this pride of yours is just too much to tolerate. Did the ancients ever get embarrassed by such trifles? No. Only their fame ever made them blush! But you! You have such a grand opinion of yourself yet you’re so easily defeated by small matters! I wish you glorious success in the Dharma, but I doubt that you will ever find it. Such pettiness!”

For the first time I saw my arrogance clearly. Ashamed, I thanked him for showing it to me. Then I ran to where Miao Feng was leaving. He was already in the cart. “Are you coming?” he asked. “You bet!” I answered, jumping into the cart without so much as a look back.

We delivered *The Tripitaka* and continued our pilgrimage. Then in the autumn, in the eighth month, we separated for a while so that Miao Feng could go ahead to attend to some matters while I took a detour across the Meng Jin River to reach the place where King Wu Wang reviewed his troops just before he attacked the Shang. It was a solemn occasion and I composed the following verse to console the spirits of the dead:

Where kingdoms clashed and men and horses fell
A stone marker reposes by the river’s edge.
The emperor’s vow to reign ten thousand years
Was written in the waters of the Huang He.

I also passed the site where the two brothers, Pai I and Shu Chi, had blocked the passage of King Wu Wang’s cavalry and had warned the king, in vain, not to attack the Shang state. There I composed these lines:

For peace they left their fortunes far behind.
Here stand a temple and a cypress tree serene.
The beauty of Shou Yong Mountain reflects
The two who strove to block the path to war.

Next I visited Shao Lin Temple where First Patriarch Bodhidharma had stayed. I heard that Master Da Qian Run Zong had just taken up residence at Shao Lin Temple. I wanted to pay my respects to him but he wasn’t at home when I called. I moved on and visited the ancient citadel of Luoyang, the Sutra Burning Terrace, and White Horse Temple. Finally, I caught up with Miao Feng in He Dong. It was the ninth month and we stayed there together for the winter as guests of Prince Shan Yin.

We kept busy. Miao Feng and I, together with an official named Chen, undertook the task of carving wooden blocks for printing *The Zhao Lun* with commentary. The text dealt with such matters as the Doctrine of Immutability and the World-destroying Whirlwind, and I, unfortunately, couldn’t grasp these concepts no matter how I tried. Then I came to the section that contained a story about an enlightened Brahmin who went back to visit the home he had left as a child. Though the Brahmin’s hair was white and he had aged considerably, a neighbor was still able to recognize him. “You’re the man who used to live here,” he said. But the Brahmin smiled and explained that man was dead and that what the neighbor was seeing was merely his image. So! This is what it meant! When your illusory, constantly changing ego-self dies you can realize your one, true and permanent nature, your Immutable Buddha-Self! Only appearances can change. The underlying reality cannot change! I wanted my ego to die-back like that Brahmin’s. I wanted to take refuge in my Buddha Self. I got up and went into the temple and prostrated myself before the altar. Everything

suddenly seemed so clear.

Then, when I got up and started to leave, I stopped on the temple steps and looked with amazement at the courtyard. A strong wind had started to blow, tearing leaves off all the trees. The air was filled with them! Yet, the leaves were motionless. They were just there, suspended in air. And all was so serene! Finally, I had perceived something with my Buddha Eye! So this was the whirlwind that destroys but does not move. And again I understood that the ego-mind continuously moves like a flow of air or water, but what it sees is actually stable—a matrix which all things pulse in and out of. Now I understood! My ego-mind had decided that a certain configuration of matter was a leaf, and then my ego-mind had decided to string together a series of images and to call this series movement: blowing leaves. In reality, there was no I standing there on the steps. There were no steps. There was neither wind nor blowing leaf. My ego-mind put arbitrary boundaries on matter and time, and gave things name and form. But reality, perceived directly without my intervening ego-mind, was nameless and formless and timeless!

Well! This was no small breakthrough! I suddenly desired to urinate. And again, watching my urine stream out, everything stopped. Experience the “eternal moment,” I saw with my Buddha Eye. Now I knew. Nothing is born and nothing can die. Everything simply “is.”

I wrote the following lines to commemorate the event:

Birth and Death. Day and Night.
Running water, stagnant pool.
Bud and fading flower.
Can I find the point at which they change
From one into the other?
Can my nostrils turn upwards?

The next day Miao Feng saw that I was different. “What have we here?” he said joyfully.

I answered, “Last night the statue of my mind and the statue of my body tried to go for a swim. If they made it into the water, I’m sure they drowned.”

Miao Feng laughed hard. “Fortune has smiled on you,” he said. “At last you can afford mountain life.”

Soon after this, Prince Shan Yin invited Chan Master Fa Guang to visit us. I had long admired him and looked forward to hearing him teach. When we talked I found that our opinions were quite similar. I asked for his guidance in my practice and he told me that I should go beyond the dualities of sacred and profane or saintly and worldly, and that I should experience higher states of consciousness, not just learn about them. I knew what he meant and thought his voice was a heavenly drum. How different the sound an enlightened man makes! How different from the rattle of common men! I had great respect for him and showed it.

Perhaps to bring me back to reality, one day he picked up a poem of mine and read it. “How do you manage to write such beautiful verses?” he said. Then he laughed and said, “Yes . . . they’re beautiful, but you haven’t seen them through the right gate . . . the “other” gate.” Then he challenged me, “No doubt your “other” gate is not yet opened.

I accepted the challenge. “Is your ‘other’ gate opened?” “I’ve spent thirty years seizing dragons and catching tigers and Ohhh,” he whined, feigning fear, “here comes a rabbit running out of the grass!”

“Venerable Sir,” said I, “you don’t look like a man who’s ever seized a dragon or caught a tiger. Would you even know them if you saw them?”

At this he raised his staff, intending to hit me with it, but I grabbed it with one hand and with the other tugged on his beard. “You talk of a rabbit!” I said, “Why, it’s only a hopping toad!”

Satisfied, he laughed and left.

On another occasion he said to me, “You don’t have to go elsewhere. Let’s stay here together and spend our lives practicing Chan.” It was quite a compliment.

Chan Master Fa Guang had a peculiar habit, a kind of nervous tic. Whenever he was alone, he’d hum and talk and gesticulate as if he were communicating with someone. I approached him about the problem. “I see that you are the equal of ancient masters both in knowledge of the Dharma and in debating skills, but why do you act so strangely as if your mind is disordered?”

“This is my Chan sickness,” he explained. “When I achieved my first awakening, words flowed out of me incessantly. I couldn’t stop them. Yes, this is my Chan disease.”

“Could this malady ever have been prevented?”

“Yes. If when it began a learned master had beaten me unconscious, then, when I awoke my mind would have been clear. Unfortunately, I did not have a learned master handy when the disease struck.”

I didn't know if he was serious or not.

Knowing that I was leaving for Five Peak Mountain in the first month of the next year, he wrote a poem for me.

A lion learns to see by riding clouds
The cave-bound dragon only needs to rest.

“Do you know what this means?” he asked.

“Before I can soar in pure transcendental wisdom, I must allow the dragon in my mind to rest.” It was my old problem.

“But be careful,” he said. “I don't want you to try to tame a dead snake.”

I was wrong when I thought that our Chan sect no longer had any great masters. Fa Guang ranked with the best.

Prince Shan Yin, when learning that my parents were still living, offered me two hundred gold coins for their support. I knew they didn't need the money, and so I asked that he give it instead to Master Fa Guang because I did not want to be in great indebtedness.

The Thirtieth Year (1575-6)

In the first month of this year Miao Feng and I left He Dong and headed to Five Peak Mountain, taking the route through Ping Yang, Miao Feng's hometown. We had a solemn task to perform. Years before, when Miao Feng was still a child, his parents had died during a severe famine and, owing to the hard times, had been buried without proper coffins.

With the help of some local officials Miao Feng selected a high, dry gravesite and reinterred his parents, marking the site with an inscribed tombstone. His family's name was Hsu and he was a descendent of Hsu Chu who gained prominence during the Chun Qiu dynasty.

When Prefect Hu Shun An learned that I was staying outside Ping Yang, he sent word asking to meet with me, but I was busy preparing to leave for Five Peak Mountain and had to send him my regrets. He responded by sending me travel passes with which I could hire a cart and men on the trip. This, too, I had to decline. I knew he'd understand when I explained that my faithful straw sandals were still doing their job.

When we had gotten as far as Ling Shi, Prefect Hu Shun An caught up with us and we were finally able to spend a few days together. Later he sent men to accompany us all the way to Five Peak Mountain.

On the fifth day of the second month, we encamped at Ta Yuan Temple, and by the third day of the third month, we were able to reach North Peak's Dragon Gate Temple. Abbot Master Da Fang permitted us to occupy an old hut that was situated high among the snowdrifts. And there, surrounded by the beautiful, snow-white scenery, I experienced a heavenly vision and my body and mind were filled with delight as I entered a Paradise of Bliss.

A few days later, when Miao Feng left to visit Ye Tai, I was able to sit alone in deep and silent meditation. I was soon so absorbed in meditation that if someone had roused me and showed me a Chinese character, I wouldn't have recognized it.

When we first arrived at the hut, the noise of the roaring wind and running water used to disturb me. Since it didn't seem to bother Miao Feng, I asked him for an explanation. He said, “The disturbance you feel is created within your own mind. You have grasped the sound and interpreted it as noise. You should listen without judgment, concentrating on the act of merely hearing so that no thoughts of any kind can arise in your mind. The ancients said that whoever hears without grasping, that is, whoever can listen to sounds without thinking, will soon attain the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara's All Pervading Wisdom.”

Hoping to master this technique, I went to a wooden bridge every day and tried to listen to the water without thinking about it or anything else. At first, all I could hear was noise. My mind kept thinking. But after a little practice, my mind began to settle down. Then, one day, when my thoughts had ceased to surge like the water, I became so immersed in the sound that I actually forgot myself. The noise and my existence were gone. Serenity enveloped my mind. After that, whenever I heard a sound that previously would have annoyed me, all I had to do was concentrate on that sound without mentally grasping it, and I would be lulled into the same serene state.

Everyday I cooked rice and ate it with wild vegetables and porridge. Then, after the meal, I'd take a nice walk. But one day, while I was walking, I happened to stop and stand still, and in that blissful moment, I entered samadhi. Soon I ceased to be aware of anything except a great brightness, round and full, clean and still like a huge round mirror. Mountains, rivers, and the great earth, itself, appeared in the mirror. When I regained consciousness, I returned to the hut and noticed that the rice cooker was covered with dust. How long had I been in samadhi? I couldn't guess. I was living alone at the time, and had no one to help me gauge the duration of this enlightenment experience.

My Chan understanding had deepened. All my previous doubts had vanished and my mind was wonderfully clear. Then, in the lingering afterglow of the great brightness, I composed these lines:

When the mind keeps tumbling

How can vision be anything but blurred?
Stop the mind even for a moment
And all becomes transparently clear!
The moving mind is polishing mud bricks.
In stillness find the mirror!

That summer Xue Lang came to visit me. He lasted only two nights in the hut. He left, expressing sympathy for me over my miserable living quarters. I got busy and built myself a sturdy cabin for the winter.

The Thirty-first Year (1576-7)

Since I had no one there to consult with about my enlightenment experience, I read *The Surangama Sutra*, hoping to gain insight and verification. I had previously read the Sutra but I hadn't understood its main theme. Now, however, I absorbed its meaning effortlessly. As the months passed, my understanding deepened and expanded until I could grasp its profundity without a single doubt.

When spring came Master Lian Chi visited Five Peak Mountain and spent a few days with me. We talked and talked, happy to discover that we were of the same mind.

That autumn, in the seventh month, Prefect Hu came to see me. He had been transferred from Ping Yang to Ying Ping. Although the weather up on the mountain was pleasant, down in the valley and along the trails he had used, it had been uncomfortably hot. Prefect Hu thoroughly enjoyed the coolness and the spectacular view. As we ate a good meal of oats mixed with wild vegetables and leeks, we watched some of his men go up to a frozen stream and break off pieces of ice to chew on. Then Prefect Hu turned to me and said, "What a wonderful world you have here. You know, when I arrived my thoughts were rushing wildly like a running brook, but here in this peaceful place they've been stilled, frozen like ice into serene silence." That winter, in the tenth month, accusations were brought against Abbot Master Da Fang, and he was forced to stand trial in ecclesiastical court. Despite the obvious falsity of the charges, he was found guilty and was sentenced to leave the Sangha and return to lay life. The shock of all this nearly destroyed his monastery. Master Zhe Hong of Lu Shan was so upset by the court's decision that he braved a heavy snowfall to come to me personally to deliver the sad news. I offered to see what I could do and immediately set out for prefect Hu's house.

The Prefect was glad to see me. "I intended to send my messenger to invite you to spend the winter here with me," he said. "Now, you have come without needing an invitation." As soon as he heard my testimony about Abbot Da Fang, he reversed the court's order. The monastery was saved.

I accepted his invitation to spend the winter at his house. He used every opportunity to question me about the Dharma, and I answered him as fully as I could.

Viceroy Gao had been transferred to Dai Zhen, and when he heard that I was staying at the Prefect's house, he told him, "Though I own a garden of verses, the flowers are all of ordinary varieties. I would very much like to grace my garden with a rare poem, one composed by an eminent person." Prefect Hu understood his meaning and promised to ask me to compose a poem for him.

I was flustered when he made the request. "My mind has been emptied," I said. "There's not a single character left in it. How can I write a poem now?" I firmly refused. But Prefect Hu cleverly left a collection of ancient and modern poetry on my table, and naturally, as soon as I flipped through the pages, the book stimulated my thinking. Now the words and sentences tumbled out of me and I could not stop writing. When Prefect Hu returned in a little while, I had already written twenty or thirty poems. Immediately I realized what was happening to me and, seeing the danger, I said to myself, "This is the Demon of Literary Fame!" I stopped writing and selected a poem to satisfy his request.

But the thinking process could not be stopped. Every poem I had ever written appeared before me. The entire universe seemed to be filled with my words and phrases. Worse, my body felt like a collection of open mouths and every one of those mouths was reciting a new poem. I was so giddy and buoyant and filled with hot air that I thought I'd soon be levitating. I couldn't stop. The poems just kept escaping from me.

The following day, when Prefect Hu accompanied Viceroy Gao to his home, I was left alone and could think about my experience. This was precisely the Chan sickness that Master Fa Guang had told me about. I had caught the disease and had no doctor to call. Maybe I can sleep it off, I thought. Then I closed the door and tried to sleep but I was too restless. I sat up and then, after a long while, I fell asleep right where I was sitting. Now I really slept.

For five days in a row, a servant boy came to my door and knocked, but he never got an answer. When Prefect Hu returned and heard about my failure to respond, he ordered his men to break into my room through the window. They found me wrapped in my robe, still sitting in the same place. He tried to wake me up using every trick he could think of, but his efforts were all in vain. I did not respond.

Suddenly he remembered once having picked up a small musical instrument called a Ching that was on the table of his Buddha shrine. He had asked me what it was for and I had explained that in India people used it to wake up monks who had entered deep samadhi and couldn't be awakened by other means. He got the Ching and holding it close to my ear began to strike it. Slowly I awakened. When I finally opened my eyes, I didn't know where I was or how I had got there. "This is your fifth day of sleep," the Prefect said. I said, "It feels more like my first day of life."

I continued to look around feeling as if I were in a dream. I could remember my days at the mountain and all my past journeys, and these events, too, were also dream-images. My mind was empty of everything that I had once thought of as real. I experienced a serene clarity of vision as when rain ceases and the clouds disperse. Delighted with the perfect tranquility, I said to myself:

In utter stillness, the bright light, pervading all, enfolds the great void.
Worldly things, when closely looked at, are like illusions in a dream.
The Buddha's words are true.

Before I left for my mountain cabin in the first months of the following year, I secured the Prefect's help in preserving the trees on the mountain. I pleaded that if the merchants continued to chop down trees for their commercial purposes there soon wouldn't be any timber left for religious use. The Prefect then wrote an order prohibiting the merchants from cutting down any more trees. Because of this, in the future there was lumber available to build new monasteries.

The Thirty-second Year (1577-8)

In the spring I left Yan Men to return to Five Peak Mountain. There I read Master Nan Yue's vows to deliver the spirits of his dead parents so that he could repay his great debt of gratitude to them. I began to think about the great debt of gratitude I owed my own parents. In fact, I could think of nothing else. My Dharma progress halted as my thoughts remained fixed on my parents.

Desperate for a solution, I decided to make a copy of *The Avatamsaka Sutra* using my own blood for ink. The happy result of this would be that I would offer my work as a sacrifice of gratitude to my parents while at the same time I would have the opportunity to gain the sutra's wisdom.

As it happened, my name was on the list of Buddhist monks who could be called upon by the Empress Mother to recite sutras for the protection of the country. When the Empress Mother learned about my decision to copy the sutra she kindly sent me gold paper. In the fourth month I started writing.

Also at that time, Master Zhe Hong decided to return to Kuang Shan. As an offering, I gave him ten poems.

The Thirty-third Year (1578-9)

Nothing could disturb me as I devoted myself to copying the sutra. With each dot and stroke, heavy or fine, I chanted the Buddha's name. I did not break this routine even when visitors came to chat with me. Despite interruptions, the text was always correct whenever I proof read it. Each day as I began my work I would enter a state of mind in which I was oblivious to my surroundings. One day, some elderly monks, who were living nearby and had heard about my concentration and accuracy, came to my cabin and deliberately tried to distract me. They didn't succeed. When they read for themselves all that I had written during their attempted disturbance, they asked Miao Feng how I was able to do this. Miao Feng replied, "My friend is used to being in samadhi."

During the time of this work I had many good dreams. Once I dreamed I entered a diamond cave and came to the stone door of Great Prajna Temple. I opened the door and went in and there, in a huge area, I saw solemn temple buildings and a spacious hall. Inside the hall, Great Master Qing Liang was resting on a large meditation bed. Miao Feng was standing on his left. I quickly went to the bed and prostrated myself and then stood on his right waiting for him to speak. Finally, he said:

In the state of the Dharmadhatu, in which merge all the glorious Buddha lands,
there are no hosts or guests, there is no coming or going.

As he spoke, the very state which he described enveloped me and I felt as if my body and mind had merged with it. After this revelation, Miao Feng asked the Great Master, "Venerable Sir, what is this state?" Master Qing Liang smiled and said, "This is the state of no state."

When I woke up all of my surroundings seemed transparent to me. I could see through everything.

In another dream I saw my body rise up high in the air. When it descended, the land was flat and shining like a crystal mirror. Looking deep into the mirror, I could see myself inside a spacious chamber which contained all manner of worldly things: men, animals, children, houses, farm yards, marketplaces, everything. These creatures were not posed prettily, as in some vapid picture. They were all performing the natural, everyday acts of life.

On and on flowed these visions of ordinary people doing ordinary things, and then suddenly in the center of the chamber, there appeared a platform upon which sat a great chair of blazing red and gold. I recognized it and was overwhelmed with joy. This was

the Great Diamond Throne! Thrilled by the chance to see it, I tried to move closer to it. But then I looked around at all the people who, oblivious to this magnificent throne, continued to perform their everyday, mundane acts. They disgusted me. They seemed so common, so filthy and coarse. Then as I protested that such vulgarity should be allowed to exist inside this glorious and immaculate place, the image of the throne retreated.

Chagrined, I immediately saw my error. What right had I to judge the worthy and unworthy, the clean and the unclean. “The Buddhist Dharma is for all mankind,” I said humbly, “not for just one pompous fool.” And instantly, the throne came nearer.

In a moment I saw that tall, dignified monks were standing in line before the throne. Suddenly, a bhiksu, holding a sutra in his hands, came down from behind the throne and handed the sutra to me, saying, “Master is going to talk about this sutra. He asked me to give it to you.” I received it with joy but when I opened it I saw that it was written in gold Sanskrit letters which I could not read. I put it inside my robe and asked, “Who is the Master?” The bhiksu replied, “Maitreya.”

Delighted, I followed him to the stairs. At the foot of the stairs I stood with my eyes closed, concentrating on my mind. Suddenly I heard the sound of a Ching and when I opened my eyes I saw Maitreya seated on the throne. His face was incomparably beautiful—dazzling red and gold! I saluted him and prostrated myself before him. Then, thinking I was specially selected to listen to the sutra, I removed it from my robe and opened it.

Maitreya said, “Discrimination is consciousness. Nondiscrimination is wisdom. Clinging to consciousness will bring disgrace but clinging to wisdom will bring purity. Disgrace leads to birth and death but purity leads to Nirvana.”

I listened to him as if I were in a dream within the dream. His voice, like the sound of tinkling crystal, floated on the air. I could hear him so clearly that even when I awoke his words kept on repeating in my mind. Now I realized the difference between consciousness and wisdom. Now I realized also that the place where I had been in my dream was Maitreya Buddha’s Chamber in the Tushita Heaven.

In another dream I saw a monk coming to me saying, “Bodhisattva Manjusri has prepared a bath for you on the North Peak. Please come with me.” I followed him and when we arrived we entered a large fragrant hall. Inside were many attendants, all of whom were monks.

I was led into a bathing chamber and as I disrobed, preparing to enter the water, I saw a girl sitting in the bath! I naturally didn’t want to go in, but the girl changed herself into a man and I then joined him in the bath. He began to pour water on my head. The water entered my head and washed away my insides. All my internal organs flowed out and all that was left of me was a transparent cage. Then the man in the bath called for tea and a monk came carrying a skull-cup which looked like half a melon.

When I looked at what was inside it, I was sickened by the sight of dripping brains and bone marrow. The monk picked up some of it and held it out for me to examine. He asked, “Is this not clean?” Then he put it into my mouth and I swallowed it. As he continued feeding the contents of the skull to me, I realized that it tasted like honey. When only bloody water remained in the bottom of the skull, the man in the bath said, “Give that to him, too.” I took the skull and drank. It was delicious. But as the liquid went down, it began to ooze out all of my pores.

Then the monk began to massage my body, harder and harder until he was pounding me like laundry on a rock. I woke up in a sweat feeling that all of my internal organs had been washed clean. From that time on, my body and mind have always felt purified, as though they had been bathed in wonder and delight.

Most of my dreams were about saints and sages. The more you listen to Buddha’s teachings, the more you will have good dreams.

The Thirty-fourth Year (1579-80)

The Empress Mother, wishing to ensure both the happiness of the late Emperor’s spirit and the protection of the present Emperor’s life, ordered the government to revamp Ta Yuan Temple and its Sharira stupa at Five Peak Mountain. But some of the government administrators thought that Five Peak Mountain was too far from the capital and so they decided to build Da Ci Shou Temple which was much closer to the capital. It wasn’t until the report of the temple’s completion was presented to the Empress’s mother that she learned that her wishes had not been carried out. Immediately she ordered a court official to take three thousand workers to Five Peak Mountain to carry out her original instructions.

This was the first religious work that the court official had undertaken and I worried that if the building project didn’t go well, the Dharma doors might be slammed shut. I gave a helping hand and tried to see that everything was completed satisfactorily.

The Thirty-fifth Year (1580-1)

That year, by Imperial order, a land tax had been imposed, and all lands throughout the country had to be measured.

Five Peak Mountain had always been exempt from taxation, but a local official contrived to twist the truth and to levy a tax of five hundred piculs of rice on our region. We were repeatedly sent orders to measure and declare the amount of taxable land we held. All the monks worried about this and I had to try to solve the problem. I carefully petitioned high government authorities

who quickly canceled the local official's orders. We were able to maintain the sanctity of Five Peak Mountain.

The Thirty-sixth Year (1581-2)

Miao Feng also used his own blood to make a copy of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*, and when he was finished, we decided to organize a great ceremonial service called a *Moksha Parishad*. The purpose of the service was to enable participants to confess sins and to receive instruction in morality and discipline. When Miao Feng collected enough money and the arrangements for the meeting were ready, we invited five hundred well-known monks from the capital to participate in the service.

However, at this same time, the Emperor ordered prayers for the birth of an heir. He sent an official to Wu Dang, a Daoist locale, to request the appropriate prayers, while the Empress Mother sent another official to Five Peak Mountain with the same request.

I thought that while all prayers were beneficial to the country, prayers for an Imperial heir were of particular importance. Many people thought that we should cancel the *Moksha Parishad* service, but I didn't see the need to cancel it. Rather, I intended to change its purpose. Instead of the monks performing the service for their own spiritual advantage, they could offer their orisons and exhortations to the cause of the Imperial heir. Unfortunately neither Miao Feng nor the official fully understood my idea. The official was particularly displeased and criticized me openly. Finally they both consented, but not before a rumor had spread that I had disobeyed an Imperial Order by continuing to prepare for the *Moksha Parishad*. Though we stirred much controversy, the true purpose of our meeting was determined and no harm befell us.

Later that year, as the stupa repairs were being completed, I placed my copy of *The Avatamsaka Sutra* and a copy of my spiritual vows inside the structure. We had to prepare to celebrate the completion of the work, but since Miao Feng was in the capital, the preparations were left entirely to me. For three straight months I barely slept as I made all the arrangements to supply one thousand guests with food, drink and lodging.

For the Festival of Water and Land, which lasted seven days and nights, I fasted, not even eating rice, and drinking only water. I still managed to have enough strength to attend all the services. The festival was a great success. five hundred tables of offerings to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were changed every day without any confusion.

Visitors were amazed and thought that this had to have been accomplished by gods, and indeed I knew that we had had the Buddha's special blessing.

The Thirty-seventh Year (1582-3)

That spring I lectured on *The Hua Yan Xuan Tan*, State Master Qing Liang's Commentary on *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. For a hundred days, a large gathering of monks and laymen came from everywhere to attend. In addition to lecturing, I had to supervise the preparation of ten thousand meals a day. Despite this number, the meals were served in an orderly fashion, and the same good silence that prevailed during the lectures continued during mealtime. But after this event, I was completely exhausted. I had no energy left at all.

Considerable money and provisions had been donated to the monastery, and when these gifts were collected and distributed, Miao Feng and I took our rice bowls and went on a journey. But our paths soon diverged, Miao Feng's going to Lu Ya and mine going to Zhang Shi Yan in the Zhen Ding District where I planned to have a nice vacation. I composed the following lines:

Life goes on. No mountain peak impales the sun.
If you come to a break in your path, leap across.

That year, in the eighth month, an heir was born to the Emperor. I went to Zhong Feng Temple west of the capital where I supervised the carving of wooden blocks for printing the *Preface of the Sayings of Zhong Feng*.

In the winter, I performed the Water rituals at Shi Shi.

The Thirty-eighth Year (1583-4)

In the first month of the year, when the Water rituals at Shi Shi were completed, I decided to go to Dong Hai. Also, since I had become famous—or infamous—because of the success of the Prayer Meeting at Five Peak Mountain, I decided to change my name from Cheng Yin to Han Shan. Fame does not aid anyone's practice.

I remembered the vow I once took to rebuild Bao En, my old temple, which had been destroyed by fire. I had taken that vow seventeen years before, when I was twenty-one. I now realized that I had gone far enough away in time and place from my vow. I would go no farther than the Dong Hai region.

On the eighth day of the fourth month, I came to Lao Shan. When I had separated from Miao Feng, he told his disciple De Zong to accompany me and to serve me. Miao Feng was afraid of my traveling alone. I accepted the help.

In a chapter of *The Avatamsaka Sutra* I had once read about the Bodhisattvas' abode. It said, "At Dong Hai there is a place called the Narayana Cave where, since the earliest times, Bodhisattvas came to dwell." Subsequently I had read Master Qing Liang's Commentary which revealed that the Sanskrit word Narayana means firm and stable, which is the meaning of Lao Shan at Dong Hai. According to another book, *Yu Gong*, the cave existed in the Qing Zhou district.

I very much wanted to visit the Bodhisattvas' abode but Lao Shan, being wild and remote, was not a particularly hospitable place to live. I traveled to the south of the mountain where there was a deep valley. Behind it lay the mountains; in front of it, the great ocean. The valley was so strange and uniquely beautiful that it seemed to belong to another world.

In the valley there was an ancient temple called the Avalokitesvara Shrine of which only the foundation remained. I researched the history of this temple and learned that in the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1341), seven Daoists, by forging the name of the Emperor Shi Zu, who was away from court on a mission, were able to take possession of this Buddhist property—which they quickly converted into a Daoist temple. Upon the Emperor's return, Buddhist monks petitioned him to restore their property to them. Eventually, however, the remoteness of Lao Shan was too great. Nobody cared about the temple and it fell into ruin. But I liked its isolation. I liked the prospects of being left undisturbed, and so I decided to stay there.

At first, I lived on a mat under the shelter of a tree, but then, seven months later, Upasaka Zhang Da Xin, a native of the district, came and built a hut for me. I stayed alone in the hut for a year with great enjoyment. During this time I had only one friend: Dharma Master Gui Feng of Ling Shan Temple at Ji Mo. He was the region's Dharma Eye.

The Thirty-ninth Year (1584-5)

That autumn, in the ninth month, the Empress Mother, grateful for the successful prayer meeting held for the birth of the Imperial heir, wanted to reward Master Da Fang, Miao Feng, and me for organizing the meeting. Master Da Fang and Miao Feng received their reward, but since I was absent, she had to send Duan An, Abbot of Long Hua Temple, to search for me. Knowing that I was at the seashore, he came to deliver the news that Her Majesty desired to reward me. I told him that the greatest reward I could possibly receive was to be allowed to remain at Lao Shan for the rest of my life.

When the Abbot reported my reply to Her Majesty, she graciously granted enough land on the Western Hill to build a temple residence for me to use. But when the official arrived to inform me of this reward, I declined to accept it. Then, when he reported my refusal to Her Majesty, she persisted and sent an official to give me three thousand gold coins with which I could build a rectory at Lao Shan. Again, I declined the reward, saying that I was very happy with my hut and didn't need anything more. But the official insisted that I accept. He was afraid to return to Her Majesty without having fulfilled her instruction.

I offered a compromise: it was a time-honored practice for the Imperial household to extend relief to famine victims. Since there currently was a severe famine occurring in Shandong province, I asked, "Why not extend Her Majesty's mercy to those starving people?" I then asked the official to distribute the money to those who needed it.

When the records of the donations were delivered to Her Majesty, she was greatly pleased and deeply moved. Later, however, I was accused of misusing court funds. When I was brought before the district court, I asked the magistrate to refer to the accounts in the court treasury. He reviewed the records and, upon determining that all of the funds had been used for famine relief, declared the accusation to be entirely false.

The Fortieth Year (1585-6)

The people living in this eastern district of Dong Hai were not Buddhists. They followed the Lo Qing cult of Daoism which had originated in Cheng Yan, at the foot of the mountain, and spread eastward. No one had even heard about Buddhism's Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

One day, a member of the Huang clan, the largest clan in the area, came to see me to inquire about the Dharma. I was able to convert him to Buddhism, and then, after a while, when clan elders and their followers also came, I converted them, too.

The Forty-first Year (1586-7)

That year an Imperial order was given to distribute the collections of *The Tripitaka* to various temples. At first, certain works that had been written in China had not be included, but the Empress Mother ordered that these works also be included. When the printing was completed, the Emperor ordered that fifteen sets should be given to well-known temples around the country. Four of the sets were distributed to four border-region temples.

At that time, the Empress Mother, still remembering the prayer meeting in Five Peak Mountain and my refusal to accept a reward, ordered that a set of *The Tripitaka* be sent to Dong Hai for me. Unfortunately, no one informed me in advance of this gift and when it arrived, there was no place to put it, and it had to be stored temporarily at the district office.

When I read for myself the Imperial order accompanying *The Tripitaka*, I decided to go up to the capital to express my gratitude.

The Empress Mother graciously asked the court ladies to donate money for the restoration of the temple at Dong Hai so that it could properly house *The Tripitaka*. She also requested that the temple be named Hai Yin which means Symbol of the Sea.

Having heard that Master Da Guan had gone to see me at Lao Shan, I hurried to return there to meet him. We met at the foot of the mountain—just as I was arriving and he was departing. Together we returned to my place by the shore, and after his visit which lasted twenty days, he gave me a poem that contained the following lines:

Leisurely I lived by the seashore,
Having dropped my burden of fame
East of the mountains.

That winter, in the eleventh month, after more than five years of nearly non-stop work, my body and mind finally found true rest one evening in the Temple's new meditation hall. What ecstasy! I had sat in meditation all evening and then, during the night, I got up and looked at the sea. Time ceased. There was no movement in the ocean. No waves or ripples disturbed the water's surface. Moonlight glistened on the still water as though it were shining on a field of snow. Everything was filled with light—the earth, the sky, the sea, and even my own body and mind. Nothing else but light existed. I recited the following gatha:

From a clear sky the bright moon shimmers
On the stilled sea and snow draped shore.
In that holy light I cannot find the water's edge.

When I returned to my room I picked up a copy of *The Surangama Sutra*, and letting it open at random, I read the following verses:

Your mind and your body, and all the mountains, rivers, and spaces of the
earth are merely phenomena that exist within the One Bright True Mind.

At that moment I gained such insight into the Sutra's meaning that I immediately began to write *The Hanging Mirror of the Surangama Sutra*. The work was finished in no time at all. That evening, when the evening meditation in the hall had ended, I asked the monk who held the second highest office in the monastery to come and read my manuscript to me. I listened, feeling as if the words were being spoken in a dream.

The Forty-second Year (1587-8)

That year, when the temple repairs were finally completed, I started teaching Buddhist Precepts to faithful followers in the new hall. Once the hall was formally opened, monks came from all over the country to attend my talks. Especially for the benefit of laymen, I gave a lecture called *Straight Talk on the Heart Sutra*.

That autumn in the eighth month, district magistrate Hu Zhong Chen, who had gone back to his native home after he had resigned his office, returned to visit me. He brought a relative's son with him and asked if I would accept him as a monk and also would allow him to serve me as my attendant. I agreed, naming the young man Fu Shan.

The Forty-third Year (1588-9)

One day, after reading *The Hanging Mirror of the Surangama Sutra*, a disciple came to me complaining that there was still much in the Sutra that puzzled him. "This Sutra is usually very clear about how we should regard the soul," he said, "but there is much written 'between the lines' that needs to be explained. In order for students to understand its profound meaning, additional commentary is needed." Then he said, "Such a commentary would be greatest gift anyone could give the Buddhist Dharma."

I immediately began to write *The Thorough Meaning of the Surangama Sutra*. Although I completed an outline of my thoughts, I didn't finish the manuscript.

That year I read *The Tripitaka* and gave lectures on *The Lotus Sutra* and *The Awakening of Faith*.

Since leaving Five Peak Mountain, I continuously thought about visiting my parents, but I was always afraid of becoming involved in worldly affairs. Now, however, I decided to test myself. One evening, in the tenth month, as I opened my eyes after meditating, the following lines occurred to me:

I've watched smoke spiral into the void of space.
In that bright mirror, I've seen a myriad things.
But last night a dragon gulped the shining moon
and in the blackness, I saw what I had missed.

I called my attendant and told him, "Now I can return to my native village to see my parents." I needed to express my gratitude to them. I planned first to go to the capital to ask the Emperor to donate a copy of *The Tripitaka* for Bao En Temple. The Emperor happily granted my request, and as soon as I received the volumes, I started my return journey without delay.

In the eleventh month, as I was traveling south to Long Jiang, the stupa there had begun to emit light. The light shone for several days and when I approached one evening bringing *The Tripitaka*, the light bent northwards like a bridge and the monks were able to walk in the light to come and welcome *The Tripitaka*. When the Sutras were safely shelved, a ceremony was held. The light continued to shine for days, and the thousands of people who witnessed it believed that this truly was a rare and favorable sign.

As soon as my mother learned that I was returning she sent a messenger to ask me exactly when I'd be home and also how much time I planned to spend there. I told him to explain that since I was also conducting official business, I couldn't be precise about my arrival time. I then joked, "If she's as happy to see me arrive as she was to see me leave, I'll spend two nights at home with her." When my mother heard this she said, "Seeing him again after all this time will be like meeting him in the next life. I'm so happy! And two nights! Just one night would have been enough, but now he is going to stay for two!"

She was so happy when she finally saw me that she couldn't stop laughing. I was surprised and delighted by her reaction. She had invited many friends and relatives to come to the house that evening and we spent the entire night talking together.

"Did you come by boat or road?" an elderly clansman of mine asked.

"Why ask about how he got here?" my mother replied.

"Well, where did he come from?" the elder then asked.

"He came from the stars!" my mother answered.

I laughed. "No wonder she let me leave home!"

Then I asked her, "Did you think of me after I left?"

"How could I not think about you? I worried all the time."

"What did you worry about?"

"At first, I didn't know where you were. Then a monk told me you were at Five Peak Mountain and I asked him in what direction that was and he said, 'North. Your son is staying under the Great Bear.' So every night I looked up at the Great Bear and thought of you as I recited the Bodhisattva's name. I saw you up there every night. If someone were to tell me you had died, I would have said, 'No. He is still there.' What I'm looking at now must be your transformation body!"

The following day we went to pay our respects to our ancestral graves. While there I found a suitable gravesite for my parents. My father was eighty years old at the time, so I joked and said, "I might as well bury him now so that I won't have to return later." Then, pretending to dig, I struck the ground several times with a mattock. My mother pulled the mattock from my hands and began to dig, saying, "While we're at it, I might as well dig my own grave, too. Then nobody will have to be bothered." On the third day, I said goodbye to my parents. My mother, happy as usual, showed no sign of grief. She was such an extraordinary woman!

At Ji Mo I had a disciple named Huang Na Shan alias Zi Guang, who was a brother of an official named Huang. He became my disciple when he was nineteen years old and I had only recently arrived at my seaside residence at Dong Hai. I taught him *The Surangama Sutra* which he learned by heart in two months. Then, despite the opposition of his parents, he firmly decided to become a vegetarian.

He was so earnest in his Chan practice that he often went without sleep. Even though he knew that I was on my way back to Dong Hai, he still prayed to Guan Yin for my safe and early return. He said, “We are frontier people. For a long time we never even got to hear about the Three Treasures. Then, by some great fortune, a wonderful master came to be our teacher and our friend. So much do we now rely upon him that if he fails to return, we will not survive the loss.” Then, as a sacrificial offering, he cut his arm open and inserted a lit candle into the bleeding slot. He prayed to Guan Yin as the candle burned down and cauterized the wound.

It took three months for the painful wound to heal, but when it did, it left a scar that mysteriously took the form of Guan Yin’s face. The features were as clearly recognizable as if they had been purposefully drawn. Though he lived at home with his wife and mother, he did not tell them the story of this scar. Then, when he came to me saying that he would leave home if I would accept him as a monk, I regretfully refused.

He protested. “Haven’t I proven my devotion to the Dharma?” he asked. “Why won’t you let me become a monk?” But since he had already committed himself to domestic responsibility, I had to refuse. Still, this incident showed that the seed of Buddhahood could take root even in a spiritual wasteland.

When I first decided to stay at Five Peak Mountain my intention was to await an opportune time to rebuild Bao En Temple which had been destroyed by fire. Of course, the project required money, too. But while much time made itself available, no money did.

When I moved to the seashore, I continued to await an advantageous time to press for the necessary funds. This occurred when I was transporting *The Tripitaka* to the southern capital. I wrote a detailed plan for rebuilding the temple and presented it to the Empress Mother. I acknowledged the difficulty of raising so much money, but suggested that it could be amassed a little at a time by, say, cutting Imperial food expenses by a mere hundred taels a day. The savings would add up until, in three years, the reconstruction could begin. In ten years it would be completed. The Empress Mother was pleased with this proposal and ordered that in that twelfth month of that year, a hundred taels a day be set aside from the food budget.

The Forty-fifth Year (1590-1)

In the spring of that year, I copied *The Lotus Sutra* in payment of my gratitude to the Empress Mother.

During this time, a few Daoist cult members got together with their priests and, claiming that their Daoist temple sites had been unjustly seized by me, tried to take possession of what was now Buddhist land and temples. They stirred up a crowd of people and, rioting at the provincial viceroy’s headquarters, demanded the return of their property. Two of my attendants and I were present during the riot. We tried to calm the crowd, but they were too unruly. Viceroy Li, believing that they had no just claim, played for time by insisting that he would send the case to Lei Zhou for a thorough investigation.

The crowd was not appeased. At one point, my attendants and I were surrounded by an angry mob. I immediately dismissed my two attendants and moved ahead alone. One of the mob leaders confronted me with a knife in his hand, threatening to kill me. I kept my composure and said gently, “And if you kill me, do you really think you’ll get away with it?” Grudgingly, he sheathed his knife. Seeing that he was in a more amenable frame of mind, I began to walk with him, trying to reason with him. We walked together for a couple of miles and were on the point of parting amicably, when the crown suddenly decided that he had betrayed them and ran towards him threatening to beat him.

Fearing that they’d kill him, I quickly grabbed his arm and practically dragged him to my residence. Inside, I had him disguised, and then we sat down pretending to be casually chatting and laughing and eating some fruit. Of course, a rumor had already spread that Daoists were murdering Buddhist monks, and when the Prefect heard the rumor, he immediately sent militia to arrest the crowd. Everyone converged on my residence. Seeing the militia and the Prefect, and knowing we were not safe, I had my Daoist guest change back into his old clothes. The crowd, thoroughly frightened, kow-towed to me, begging me to save them.

“Did these rioters murder any Buddhist monks?” the Prefect asked.

“Rioters? No, this group of people didn’t kill anyone,” I said simply. “In fact, their leader and I have been sitting here talking quietly and enjoying a little fruit.”

“What was all the noise about?” the Prefect demanded to know.

“That was just marketplace noise,” I answered. “Just disperse the crowd. There’s no need for jail.”

The Prefect quickly understood the true situation and ordered the local authorities to send the people back to their homes. In less than three days, law and order were completely restored.

That year I wrote a commentary on the works of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi.

The Forty-sixth Year (1591-2)

In this year the Empress Mother commissioned a sandalwood statue of Vairocana for the main temple hall which was now completed.

In the autumn, my disciple Huang Zi Guang died while sitting in meditation.

The Forty-seventh Year (1592-3)

In the seventh month of the year, I went to the capital and visited Master Da Guan in his mountain lodge. Centuries before, in the Jin Dynasty, Dharma Master Yuan, worried that Buddhist teachings were in danger of disappearing, had the sutras carved in stone. He then stored the stones in a nearby cave. Later, however, Buddhist monks decided to sell the temple and stupa, and so the buildings remained, not serving any Buddhist cause until Master Da Guan came and redeemed them. He took me to the cave and showed me the treasure of stone sutras. It was all such a wonderful story that I did not hesitate when he asked me to write it out. Delighted to do so, I recorded the recovery of the stones, stupa and temple. I also took some time to organize the manuscripts that I had written at Hai Yin Temple.

Then, for forty days and nights, Master Da Guan and I sat facing each other as if we were united in one state of samadhi. This was the most beautiful time of my life.

The Forty-eighth Year (1593-4)

That year, a severe famine in Shandong province caused many people to starve to death. The streets were filled with the dead. Near our mountain, there were many hungry people. We fed them with our temple’s provisions, and after our supplies were exhausted, I went by boat to Liao Dong to buy more staples. Not a single person on our side of the mountain died of starvation.

The Forty-ninth Year (1594-5)

That spring in the third month, Viceroy Zheng Kun Ya of Shandong visited me. He had many questions about the Dharma, which I happily answered.

In the tenth month, for the winter solstice festival, I went to the capital to extend holiday greetings to the Empress Mother. I accepted an invitation to stay on several months for the New Year celebrations and also to lecture on Buddhist Precepts at Ci Shou Temple.

By this time, the Empress Mother had amassed a considerable sum of money for the Bao En Temple rebuilding project. I asked her when the reconstruction would commence. Owing to a political crisis which had been created by the Japanese invasion of Korea, Chinese troops were being mobilized, and under these circumstances, she had to defer any decisions about the temple project.

The Fiftieth Year (1595-6)

This was not a good year. In the spring, no sooner had I returned from the capital to my seaside temple, then I was arrested on a variety of charges.

First of all, owing mostly to Daoist intrigue, the Empress Mother’s devotion to Buddhism and her kind attentions to me were

not entirely appreciated by the Emperor and by some other ranking members of the Imperial court. Many courtiers resented Her Majesty's gift to me of *The Tripitaka* and her request that other ladies of the court donate the money to build a suitable temple to house it. They also resented that while others had paid for the temple, she personally chose to rename it Hai Yin, a renaming which seemed to give Imperial recognition to the Buddhist claim of ownership.

Then too, that old misunderstanding about the *Moksha Parishad* had never fully been resolved. Many officials still thought that I had disobeyed an Imperial order. Complicating this, these court officials also detested the Empress Mother's envoy, the one who had delivered both *The Tripitaka* and the money which had been donated to build the temple to house it. Of this money, I had used only seven hundred gold coins on the construction project and had asked the envoy to distribute the remainder of the gift to those who were suffering from the famine, and he had done so. But at the instigation of several Daoist functionaries and those resentful court officials, charges of having misused the entire sum were brought against the hated envoy and me.

My Bao En rebuilding plan also aroused much enmity. Court members, especially those who were not Buddhists, did not see why they should suffer even a small reduction in the sumptuousness of their meals just to satisfy my sentimental fondness for an old temple. That Her Majesty could have been persuaded to finance my expensive whim suggested that I had undue influence in the Imperial court. Their irritation extended even to the court administrator who oversaw the collection of the money saved from the daily food budget. He, too, was charged with fiscal irresponsibility.

Most serious of all, however, was the old charge that I had illegally seized Daoist property at Dong Hai mountain. When the Daoists of the area had rioted, the Prefect had been able to disperse their bodies; but neither he nor I had been able to disperse their enmity. The Daoists continued to press their grievance against me and when they and the disgruntled court officials became allies, their petty grievance took on Imperial dimensions. A formal complaint replete with exaggerations and false accusations was drawn up against me and presented to the Emperor by an agent of theirs who, for this purpose, falsely presented himself as a Daoist priest. It was an effective piece of deception. The Emperor, angered and indignant, immediately gave the arrest order.

Upon learning of my misfortune, my friends and disciples were extremely upset and I naturally tried to console them. "I have been here with you for twelve years. Think of what has been accomplished during this time. People who wandered aimlessly without any moral guidance now walk strong and straight on our sacred Buddhist path. I have heard little children sweetly chant the Buddha's name. What do I have to regret?" And then, recalling my old vow to rebuild Bao En Temple, I corrected myself. "That Bao En Temple is not likely to be restored in my only real regret."

At the capital, the Bureau of Pacification was ordered to interrogate me. Before being formally indicted on all counts, I was beaten and relentlessly questioned about the Empress Mother's donations to various Buddhist monasteries, donations which, according to my accusers, totaled several hundred thousand gold coins. I refused to say anything that might compromise Her Majesty's devotion to Buddhism; and, as to the donation which the court ladies had made, I fortunately was able to produce court records which showed exactly how and where the money had been spent. The charge of misappropriation of funds was then dropped.

I was further prodded to betray the Empress Mother by saying that she had not only sanctioned my illegal acquisition of Daoist property at Dong Hai but had actually encouraged it when she had requested that money be donated to construct a new Buddhist temple on a old Daoist site. I related to the court the historical research of the area which I had done when I first arrived at Dong Hai. I contended that the property had been originally Buddhist, that Daoists had illegally obtained title to it by forging the Emperor's signature, that subsequently Buddhist authorities had successfully petitioned for its return, and that, in any case, the temple site had long been abandoned when I arrived. These, I insisted, were assurances I had given Her Majesty.

I presented my views with such conviction that the Emperor readily understood how the Empress Mother would have accepted my version of the facts without any doubt as to their accuracy. He and the Empress Mother were completely reconciled. I was devoted to both Their Majesties; and the one consolation I was able to derive from my ordeal was that I had not succumbed to torture and allowed myself to become an instrument of familial dissension.

But it was the Daoists' version of the facts that the Emperor chose to accept; and I was found guilty of illegally building temples at Dong Hai. Accordingly, I was jailed in Lei Zhou. This was in the third month of the year.

Throughout my trial, all of the temples in the capital continuously recited sutras for me and held Kshamayati ceremonies which invoked divine patience and forgiveness. Some monks even offered the sacrifice of letting incense sticks burn down on their arm while they repeated mantras and prayers for my safety. At Jin Wu, the son of Official Zheng Fan Ji of An Su, whom I had never met, held a banquet for the purpose of rallying support of nobles and gentry. With tears in his eyes, he told them of my innocence. His audience expressed much regret for my suffering and for the damage that was being done to our Buddhist Dharma. In this they reflected the true attitude of the people towards the Dharma at that time.

For eight months I remained in prison. During this time only Fu Shan was permitted to bring me food.

That winter, in the tenth month, I was deported to the South. Many people, including officials who dressed as ordinary citizens, accompanied me to the river bank. My attendant Fu Shan and two or three other monks followed me.

In the eleventh month I arrived in Nanjing. After saying goodbye to my mother, I composed a literary work entitled *Mother and Son*. When I departed, I took my orphaned nephew with me.

I recalled that earlier, when Master Da Guan and I had stayed together on the mountain of the Stone Sutras, he had said, commenting on the decline of the Chan sect, that Cao Ji (Nan Hua Si), the source of Chan, might also be deteriorating. We had then decided to go there to revive the monastery. He had in fact gone ahead and was waiting for me to join him at Kung Shan. When I was arrested, he was staying at Tian Chi.

When Master Da Guan heard of my arrest, he was stunned. Then he sadly noted, “If Master Han Shan is gone, our vow to revive Cao Ji cannot be fulfilled.” Nevertheless, he continued on to the monastery before returning to Liao Cheng.

When he learned that I would be arriving in Nanjing, he went there to wait for me. We were able spend time together talking in a temple by the river bank. He wanted to go to the capital to plead my case for me, but I discouraged him from doing this. “As a son obeys his father, I obey His Majesty. What is the difference between families and governments. This sentence is my fate and I accept it. Please,” I begged him, “Do not do or say anything in my defense.”

Before we parted he grasped my arm and said, “When I heard that you were arrested at Tian Chi, I vows before the Buddha’s shrine to recite *The Lotus Sutra* one hundred times for your safety. I prayed with all my heart that you would be delivered from harm. I pray not that you will have no further trouble.” I humbly thanked him.

He later wrote to me, sending me a copy of his composition, *The Expulsion of a Guest*.

The Fifty-first Year (1596-7)

In the first month, still in the state of banishment, I crossed Wen Jiang River and visited Imperial Counselor Zhou. Upasaka Wang Xin Hai of Lu Ling came to the bout to pay his respects and to ask me to write a commentary on *The Lankavatara Sutra*.

In the second month I went up to the peak of Yu Mountain to see the place where Wei Ming attempted to seize the Sixth Patriarch’s robe. In memory of this event, I wrote these two lines:

And when you passed this way before, beloved Journeyman,
One who followed showed you his Immortal Face.
Shall mine be seen so clearly?

The site was truly inspirational and well worth seeing, but the path to it was far to rugged to travelers. I therefore instructed one of my attendants to set up a booth to offer free tea to visitors, and I encouraged local Buddhists to work on the road and to persuade each visitor to also contribute a little help. Within a few years the path to the site was smooth and safe.

When I arrived at Shao Yang, I went immediately to the mountain to pay reverence to the Sixth Patriarch. I drank the water of Cao Ji and wrote the following gatha:

One drop of Cao Ji’s water was enough
To make the ocean waves lash at the sky
And change the timid fish to dragons.
The spring is clogged. The well is dry.
In the calm sea no infant dragons stir.

The Sixth Patriarch’s temple was nearly deserted and close to ruin. Deeply saddened, I left for Guangzhou.

When I arrived there, I put on prisoner’s garb and bonds and presented myself to the military general who untied my cords and invited me to a feast at Hai Zhu Temple.

At that time, Imperial Counselor Zhou Hai Men was lecturing on Yan Ming metaphysics. When he heard of my arrival, he called on me bringing a few dozen of his followers along. He began a discussion by referring to the saying: “One cannot realize the

truth until one understands the condition of day and night.”

A Daoist elder who was sitting among them responded. “The condition is consciousness,” he said. “And day and night are waking and sleeping. The same consciousness that functions during our daylight actions, functions during the night in our dream actions.” The audience showed its approval.

Counselor Zhou then turned to me. “Venerable old Chan Master,” he said, “thought everyone else seems to be satisfied with this interpretation, I am not. Please give us your opinion.”

“What is the source of the quotation?” I asked

“It is from *The Book of Changes*,” he answered, reciting a few additional sentences.

“These words are a wise man’s advice to men that they should transcend Samsara and get beyond birth and death,” I said.

The Counselor applauded. “Only this old master’s interpretation accords with the text. The meaning is now clear.” But his followers didn’t understand and asked for further explanation.

“Day and night are the illusion called birth and death,” the counselor explained. “Not until one is delivered from the conditions of this illusion, can one experience reality.”

This time everyone was in agreement. At the request of some devoted Buddhists, Viceroy Chen issued traveling passes to me for my journey south. On the tenth day of the third month, I arrived at Lei Zhou and stayed at an old temple located in the western part of the town. In a few weeks I began to write my *Commentary on The Lankavatara Sutra*.

At that time a year long drought had produced a terrible famine, and due to the people’s weakened condition, an epidemic raged though the area, resulting in many deaths. As though sitting in a cemetery, I was surrounded by death. But the power of the Dharma shielded me from disease and, fortunately, I did not fall ill.

Due to the drought, all the wells had dried up. Every night, my attendant Fu Shan would wait until midnight before going out to try to obtain a small can of water for the following day’s use. Times were very hard and water seemed as precious as ambrosia.

Corpses piled up everywhere. By Autumn, when the epidemic had abated, I and a scholar named Ke Shi Fu organized the burial of about the thousand victims. I then held a funeral service for the dead while at the same time offering prayers for rain. The prayers were overwhelmingly answered. A few hours after the service, it rained so heavily that the streets were soon three-feet deep in water. The drought and the last vestiges of the epidemic were washed away.

In the eighth month, by order of the prefecture, I returned to Guangzhou. Still under limited military supervision, I stayed in a barracks and while there composed some twenty poems about my experiences traveling with the army.

While on the road to Guangzhou I passed though Ku Teng of the Dian Bai district which was considered the gateway to the country. This was my first visit to the area and to commemorate it I wrote a literary composition. I also helped to set up a station where travelers could get free tea.

At Guang Hai I met Imperial Counselor Ding You Wu, who, like me, had been victimized by the judicial system. False accusations had resulted in his being banished there. I had always admired him and now that we had so much in common, we were able to become close friends.

The Fifty-second Year (1597-8)

The winter had brought much hardship to Guangzhou. Corpses and skeletal remains, numbering in the thousands, lay in the streets. Ding You Wu and I worked hard organizing burial details, and after the sad task was completed we held a seven-day ceremony for the welfare of the dead. Our efforts were much appreciated and many Cantonese converted to Buddhism.

That summer, in the fourth month, I finished my *Commentary On The Lankavatara Sutra* but because some of my disciples didn’t understand its main theme, I also wrote *The Zhong Yong Directly Explained* which enabled them to comprehend the sutra.

Persons convicted of crimes were not usually welcomed in polite society. Convicted priests were particularly despised. So, generally, I was treated coldly or even shunned by most people. But it so happened that Viceroy Chen Ru Gang, who was so strict

in his duty and stern in his manner that no one ever even dared to call upon him privately, frequently sent his men kindly to inquire about me. Encouraged by this, Ding You Wu and I decided one day to pay him a visit. Naturally, we didn't get past the doorkeeper.

That evening, however, the Viceroy came by boat to visit me. He brought food and tea and we sat and talked until midnight. His friendship towards me astonished everyone. Afterwards he openly praised me to other officials, even claiming that I was the most accomplished master in the sangha. To emphasize his support of me, he ordered various department-heads to visit me; and in no time the people of the entire Ling Nan region began to show me some respect.

The Fifty-third Year (1598-9)

That spring, in the first month, the administrator who had been accused of fiscal irresponsibility in the matter of the Bao En rebuilding plan was banished to Lei Yang. He called on me in Guangzhou where I was editing the manuscript of my commentary on *The Lankavatara Sutra*. When he asked about the scenery of Lei Yang, I showed him my manuscript, saying, "This is the scenery of Lei Yang." He appreciated the view enough to immediately start soliciting donations for carving the wooden blocks to print it.

Inspector Zhou Hai Men, head of the Guangdong salt tax office, called on me frequently to ask about the Dharma. He was particularly interested in the history of the Sixth Patriarch's monastery at Cao Ji and asked me if I would revise the official Cao Ji Annals.

At that time very little Buddhist theology was being taught in Guangdong. One day, Imperial Counselor Zhou Hai Men, who taught Yang Ming metaphysics, brought his class to me to ask me about Buddhism. One of his students, Long Sheng, was sufficiently impressed by my teachings so that when he returned home he repeated them to two of his friends, Wang An Shun and Feng Sheng Chang. Later, the three of them returned to my residence and asked me to instruct them further. I taught them the transcendental doctrine which they understood and accepted. They earnestly practiced Chan and were able to convert many others to Buddhism. Because of the efforts of these three disciples, the Three Treasures became well known in the area.

That summer I set up a meditation hall in order that I might openly preach the Dharma. Recalling Master Da Guan's vow to recite *The Lotus Sutra* a hundred times to reduce suffering. I decided to teach this sutra to the few dozen monks and disciples who gathered in the hall. When I came to the chapter on the Precious Stupa, I suddenly grasped the Buddha's meaning. The Pure Land of Buddhas existed before everyman's eyes. The Three Transformations which were necessary to enter it were available to all, even to those of inferior ability. I then wrote a commentary entitled *Applauding the Lotus Sutra*.

My friend Ding You Wu had a quick and fiery nature, but he had a warm and generous heart. He showed respect towards the Sangha even though he didn't know anything about the Dharma. But little by little I instructed him until one day, as he was boarding a boat, he realized the Great Awakening. Cautioning him always to discriminate the truth, I gave him the name Upasaka Jue Fei. I also wrote him the following poem as a reminder.

Purify Your Mind

Your True Nature is deep, like still, clear water in a lake.
If you allow the bottom to be stirred by love and hate,
Waves of passion will arise. What was clear will become murky.
With your vision obstructed, you will not notice
How your troubles are increasing.
If you look with desire upon people or things,
You throw mud into the clear water.
If you allow yourself to become another's desire.
You are like oil poured on passion's fire.
When the clamoring ego sinks to silence,
Burning hells will turn to ice.
Let your ego slip gently towards a muted death.
When the ego's eyes are closed, in vain does harm appear.
This death does not come easy. Be on guard against old habits
That, haunting, come to quicken it. Be steadfast and endure.
Alertness brings awareness and awareness is a light that in a
Searing flash obliterates all traces of the ghost.
Let your True Nature shine forth in perfect clarity.
Rest easy in the pure, serene stillness of the One.
Alone, you are a sovereign. Yourself, a precious kingdom.

Reign with peace and harmony!
What external force can possibly invade?

The Fifty-fourth Year (1599-1600)

In the spring I finished carving the wooden blocks for my *Commentary On The Lankavatara Sutra*. I lectured on the Sutra and distributed one hundred copies of it to learned Buddhists and to those government officials who had assisted the spread of the Dharma. I particularly wanted them to know that despite my difficulties I was still performing my clerical duties.

Many Cantonese observed the custom of sacrificing animals to their ancestors. On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, many animals were gathered for one sacrificial ritual. It was so pitiable, seeing them waiting to be slaughtered, that I introduced the Ullambana ritual in which vegetarian food and prayers were offered in sacrificial respect to the ancestors. I sermonized on the sanctity of all life and tried to persuade people to cease killing animals both for food and for acts of ritual sacrifice. It pleased me to see how many of them accepted my teachings. From that time on, funeral ceremonies and ceremonies marking parental birthdays, as well as Khsamayati ritual service, were usually performed with vegetarian food offered in substitute of animal flesh. Many birds and animals were actually set free. This kindness to animals was looked so favorably that many people were moved to convert to Buddhism.

That summer, in the fifth month, Magistrate Chen, who had been my intimate Dharma friend, returned home. When he arrived he did not call upon me or any of the senior monks, but instead sent a messenger to request that I lend him one hundred sets of eating utensils. I complied with his request. Later, we were all surprised when he invited us to a banquet. Naturally, he served us with the borrowed utensils. It was good to know that he had so much respect for the sangha. Before long, he resigned his office. Fearing that he might be in poor health, I went to visit him, but he had passed away just before I arrived. His body was brought into town the next day and I went directly to the mortuary to pay my last respects to him.

At the mortuary, I met Supervisor Ren of the Chao Yang district. He and I went to Hui Yang together and then, accepting his invitation, I went on with him to visit West Lake. At Dong Po we climbed White Crane Peak. My sadness over Magistrate Chen's death did not leave me, and when I returned home I declined to see any visitors and instead sat in solitary meditation.

The Fifty-Fifth Year (1600-1601)

The Japanese invasion frightened the entire country. In addition to national fears, local communities were terrorized by customs' tax collectors. I decided to close the temple temporarily and, scattering my followers, I went to a nearby retreat.

Rice merchants, attempting to profit from the calamitous situation, began to export large quantities of rice to Fujian Province; and, as rice became scarce in Canton, its price soared. Most people could not afford to buy rice and as their hunger grew so did their anger toward the Fujianese.

Now, the Fujianese traditionally painted their commercial vessels white, and the customs' tax collectors were easily able to spot them. So, of course, could the people; and whenever the tax collectors boarded a Fukien rice boat, people would gather on the docks to jeer at the crew.

On one occasion, the tax collectors boarded a Fujianese vessel and discovered the son of Canton's Provincial military commander, who was a native of Fukien. When the people learned of the son's presence on the boat, they began to riot. They could hardly believe that their commander, whose duty was to protect the people of Canton, was actually contributing to their suffering by helping his own son to profit in the rice market. When the news of this official abuse spread, thousands of people came to join the riot. Throwing rocks and brandishing weapons, they marched on the provincial administration office.

As luck would have it, all three of the high ranking administrators had gone to Jun Men for a festival and there was no one in authority to deal with the rioters. Desperate to resolve this situation, the commander sent his assistant to my retreat to ask for my help. At first I refused, saying that I wasn't able to perform miracles. But then the assistant began to weep and, dropping to his knees, implored me to help. "So many people will die," he said, and hearing this, I got up and hurried to the scene of the riot.

I shouted to the crowd, "What you want is rice, what you're asking for is death. Don't you realize that by rioting you are breaking the law! You can receive the death sentence for this! I know that you want cheaper rice. But even if you got it cheaply, how could you eat it if you're dead?" I begged them to return to their homes and they slowly withdrew.

Meanwhile, when the three high ranking provincial administrators who were partying at Jun Men heard about the riot, they

returned immediately. But by the time they arrived all was quiet and peaceful.

Everyone credited me with quelling the riot. Supervisor Ren, commenting on my new celebrity, wrote to me, “If you hadn’t come out, what would have happened to the town? But since you did come out, what will happen to you?” I, too, knew that I would have no peace because of my intervention.

That autumn, in the seventh month, Supervisor Dao Zhu of the Nan Shao District, invited me to Cao Ji. I seized this chance to get away. The invitation also gave me the opportunity to pay my respects to the Sixth Patriarch’s remains.

But my successful intervention had also secured an invitation from our new Viceroy Dai. Actually, he ordered the commander to bring me to his office.

The Viceroy received me warmly, even serving me special vegetarian meals, and delighted me by giving his assurance that he would protect the Dharma. As we parted he told me to call upon him for help whenever I needed it. Relieved and happy, I said goodbye to him and headed for Cao Ji.

The Fifty-sixth Year (1601-1602)

In Spring, during the first month, I arrived at Cao Ji and found that the Sixth Patriarch’s nine hundred year old monastery, the very source of Chan Buddhism, had been converted into a meat market. Squealing animals were being slaughtered, dressed and butchered. Stinking piles of worm infested guts filled the stately courtyard. Huckstering vendors in clap-board stalls shouted for the milling crowds’ attention. The entire place was in total disarray. Even the graveyard, intended only for clerical remains, had been invaded by the dead relatives of neighboring villagers.

The monks still in residence at Cao Ji were as helpless as sheep. Whether from bribery or fear, they did nothing to oppose the profanation of this hallowed place. Merchants, tradesmen, and an assortment of brigands conducted their vile business without any opposition from clerical or civil authorities.

Deeply distressed, I went to Viceroy Dai and begged him to help. His response was immediate. He ordered the district magistrate to dispatch the militia to Cao Ji, and, within three days, the vendors and tradesmen were driven away and their shops and stalls torn down. The piles of filth were removed and the entire temple complex was cleaned.

With much satisfaction, the Viceroy and I inspected the monastery. Afterwards, as we enjoyed a vegetarian meal, he said to me, “Master, I did you a favor by cleaning up the Sixth Patriarch’s monastery. In return, you can do me a favor.”

“I’ll do whatever I can,” I replied. “What exactly is the problem?”

He explained, “The people of this region are constantly being harassed by piratical pearl divers and rogue miners, who, among other mischief, rob ancestral graves. The law is powerless to apprehend these criminals because no one knows when or where they are going to strike. There are many pearl diving vessels and when one of them commits an act of piracy, no one can determine the guilty vessel. You see,” he confided, “the supply of pearls has dwindled so much that there is not much work for the divers to do. But since they can earn a living stealing from the people here, they refuse to leave. It’s the same situation with the miners. When they’re not exploiting the local workers in the mines, they come at night to rob the ancestral graves. Both the pearl divers and the miners have official permission to work here so we simply cannot drive them away. The people here are grievously oppressed by such lawlessness; and I confess that I just don’t know how to help correct the situation.”

“I can see your problem,” I said. “It won’t be an easy one to solve.” But I agreed to try to help.

It so happened that Li, the officer in charge of the pearl fishery and mining operations, came to Cao Ji to spend a few autumn days in the pleasant surroundings of the mountain monastery. I undertook to instruct him in the Dharma which he received with great delight.

Now a devoted Buddhist, Li wanted to show his appreciation by doing more than just donating money to the monastery. I saw my chance to propose a solution to the problem. “Clearly,” I said, “when the Emperor issued work permits, it was not his intention to allow the divers and miners to remain in the area after their work was completed. And certainly he never intended that they should oppress the people so cruelly. I know that the culprits claim that they are still legitimately working but you and I both know that this claim is merely an excuse for remaining.” I then suggested that Li require proof of labor by inspecting the results of the work they said they were doing. If they could produce neither pearls nor ore, they should be ordered to leave the area. Fines could be imposed if they failed to leave as ordered.

Li thought my plan had merit and implemented it without delay.

The miscreants were dispersed and order was restored. Thus, by being instrumental in pacifying the community, I was able to repay my debt to Viceroy Dai. Extremely grateful, he became an even more enthusiastic protector of the Dharma. Under his aegis I was able to expand Cao Ji's temples, improve roads, start a training program for monks, arrange for certain accomplished monks to teach Buddhist Precepts, establish clerical rules and regulations, appoint a hierarchy to govern efficiently and fairly, collect rents, pay taxes, and redeem all of the temple's properties. All this was accomplished within a year.

The Fifty-seventh Year (1602-1603)

During this year additional work was done at Cao Ji. We renovated the Sixth Patriarch's hall, built a retaining wall at the rear of the temple complex, improved numerous paths and lanes, and converted some of the secular buildings that had been constructed by the merchants into guest houses for visiting monks.

The Fifty-eight Year (1603-1604)

In the eleventh months of that winter, Master Da Guan was jailed in the capital because of charges made against him in an anonymous letter sent to a government official. I feared that his association with me had made him enemies and, indeed, at his trial he was implicated in my case. I knew that master Da Guan would never betray me, but knowing also the power of my enemies, I fully expected new indictments to be handed down against me. I prayed and waited. Then, sadly, Master Da Guan died in his cell while sitting in meditation.

The Emperor was merciful and no further charges were brought against me. I was permitted to travel to the South. Also that year, my attendant, Xin Guang, joined the sangha.

The Fifty-ninth Year (1604-1605)

That spring, in the first month, I left Cao Ji and returned to Lei Zhou. I recalled that Master Da Guan had once told me that *The Surangama Sutra* required more commentary. "Cause and effect, as related to worldly affairs, needed to be thoroughly explained," he had said. I decided to write about immorality and how evil forces, when they are not properly restrained, can corrupt even the best people. I called my book, *Chun Qiu Zuo's Doctrine of the Mind*.

The Sixtieth Year (1605-1606)

That spring, in the third month, I crossed Hai Nan Sea to Nan Zhou and stayed at Ming Chang Temple while I wrote the preface to the book on immorality which I had just completed. I also visited Feng Lang Temple, made famous by poet Su Dong Po, and went to see White Dragon Spring. I searched for but could not locate the temple of Chan Master Jue Fan.

I then wrote about my explorations in the area and also recorded my impressions of The Golden Corn Fountain which I had seen when visiting Ming Shan.

One night, as I sat on a hill watching the distant town of Ju Cheng, I had a terrible premonition that the town was going to be destroyed. I told my followers about my premonition and asked them to pray for the town's survival. None of the townspeople gave my warning any consideration at all. Dismayed by their indifference, I decided to leave the area. Everyone pleaded with me to stay, but I refused.

One night, two weeks after I left, a strong earthquake struck. The town's gate, eastern wall and numerous buildings were destroyed. Ming Chang Temple also collapsed. The bed in which I would have been sleeping when the quake occurred was buried in tons of debris. Had I not left when I did, I would surely have been killed.

That summer, in the fourth month, the Viceroy allowed me to return to Guangzhou.

That autumn, in the seventh month, I went back to Cao Ji for the completion of the restoration work on the Sixth Patriarch's temple. Unfortunately, due to lack of money, only sixty or seventy percent of the work had been done. I had to go to several Buddhist officials and beg for the required funds. With their donations, the rebuilding project was finally completed that year.

I also repaired the Chang Chun An Temple in Guangzhou. It became a subsidiary temple to Cao Ji.

That winter, in the tenth month, my attendants, Guang Yi and Guang Se, joined the sangha.

The Sixty-first Year (1606-1607)

That spring, in the third month, I visited Ding You Wu and Nan Zhou. I also visited Premier Zhang Hong Yang to thank him for his support during my trial. When I was arrested, Premier Chang, who was the chief minister at the time and knew the details of the case, tried his best to rescue me. He was happy to see me and invited me and my followers to dinner at Xian Yun restaurant. During the meal he said, “Everyone knows that Master Han Shan is a learned Chan master, but few people know just how much he has done for the dynasty.” He then went on to list my efforts made on behalf on the Imperial family. I was asked to speak about some of my experiences, and everyone was both surprised and touched by sentiments I expressed.

Later I returned to Cao Ji. When I passed Wen Jiang, Counselor Zhou invited me to stay in his home for a few days. After this I went to Ahang Gong where I became very ill. General Chen Er Shi brought me to his house and I spent an entire month there recovering. I managed to write twelve poems during my stay with him.

That autumn, in the eighth month, the Emperor’s grandson was born. In celebration, the Emperor ordered the release of all old and sick prisoners who were suffering banishment. He also offered amnesty to those who could successfully appeal their convictions. I petitioned the provincial judge of Lei Zhou to review my case, and after doing so, he ordered the suspension of my sentence and my exemption from further military supervision.

The Sixty-second Year (1607-1608)

In the spring, according to Viceroy Dai’s request, I returned to Cao Ji and resumed teaching the Buddha Dharma.

When I was young, I often read *Lao Zi’s Dao De Jing*, an ancient work the meaning of which was extremely profound and often difficult to comprehend. Later, having studied it thoroughly and being certain that I understood it, I complied with my students’ request and began to write a commentary on it. I was forty-seven when I began writing this commentary; and now, in my sixty second year, I was finally able to finish it.

The Sixty-third Year (1608-1609)

The main hall of Cao Ji Temple badly needed repairs but there was no money to pay for the work. In the spring, however, Superintendent Feng Yuan Cheng of the Western District came to see me. During the previous night, as he slept in the mountains, he dreamed of Guan Yin. So when he arrived at Cao Ji he went immediately to the main hall to pay reverence to the Buddha. When he looked up at the Three Great Buddhas of the Western Paradise, he was filled with sorrow. Two of the statues were badly damaged.

He came to me and asked why I didn’t have them properly restored, and I answered that we simply did not have the money to do it. Then he asked how much it would cost to effect repairs to the entire hall, including the statues; and when I gave him an estimate, he said “Well, that doesn’t seem too difficult of a sum to raise. I’ll try to get it for you.”

He went to Viceroy Dai and told him about the sad condition of the main hall. Viceroy Dai said, “When one sees a child fall into a well, one crawls down to save him. Seeing now that the holy site of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is ruined, one cannot sit back and do nothing.” Then, when the Superintendent repeated my estimate of the cost of repairs, Viceroy Dai replied, “This should not be too difficult.” He immediately ordered an official from Nan Shao to come and make a formal estimate.

He invited me to come and discuss the project with him, and, upon learning that he intended to finance the reconstruction with official funds, I offered a counter plan. “Since it really wouldn’t be correct to use public moneys for such an expense, and since great merit accrues to those who voluntarily contribute to the creation of Buddhist works, why not let everyone contribute what he can?”

Viceroy Dai then instructed his subordinates to receive, with documented receipt, the donations of private citizens. The money would be given directly to Viceroy Dai and not to the monks. Within a month, nearly a thousand gold coins were collected.

I went to the western region to shop for timber, and when I reached Duan Zhou, the Viceroy asked me to remain and supervise the repairing of Bao Yue Hall. Another official did my timber shopping for me. When the repair work was completed that winter, I wrote a story about it. The purchased timber was gathered at the riverbank and gradually transported down-river.

In the eleventh month, Viceroy Dai was accused of mishandling a military reprisal against some bandit invaders from Indochina. He was dismissed from his office.

The Sixty-fourth Year (1609-1610)

That spring, in the second month, we set sail for Meng Jiang with our cargo of timber. But the winds, which were favorable when we left Duan Zhou, had picked up considerably; and by the time we neared Ling Yang Pass, they were gusting so much that, taking haven, we lowered our sails and dropped anchor.

I went ashore to visit Duan Ji, and there, while awaiting better sailing conditions I wrote *A Dream Journey to Duan Ji*.

When we finally docked at Meng Jiang, I gathered some longshoremen; and while they unloaded the cargo, I returned to the Sixth Patriarch's temple.

I could not have imagined my reception there. A few trouble making monks, acting from personal jealousy, or perhaps, at the instigation of some of the merchants I had caused to be evicted, had convinced everyone that I had diverted thousands of gold coins to my private use. I was accused of being a thief.

Disheartened, I declined to comment upon so false an accusation; and while the formal charges against me were being prepared, I retired to the meditation hall and silently recited *The Diamond Sutra*.

Then, as I repeated the lines, oblivious to the turmoil around me, my attention became fixed on the Buddha's insistence that it was far better to teach one line of Buddhist truth than it was to perform a thousand worldly acts of charity, however, well-intentioned. Chagrined, I clearly saw that I, myself, was the author of the charges against me, for I had allowed myself to become too involved in worldly accomplishments. I, who had been privileged to understand even a small part of the Buddha's Great Wisdom, had a duty to enlighten others to that wisdom. And instead I had busied myself with fund-raising and had gone shopping for timber! To atone for such dereliction, I wrote a long commentary *The Diamond Cutter of Doubts* in which I tried to clarify any possible doubts as to its wonderful meaning.

During my trial, I presented evidence of my innocence and pleaded my case as best I could. Then, while staying in a boat on the Fu Rong River, I awaited the courts' decision.

During this time, Prefect Xiang Chu Dong invited me to come by boat to visit him. The weather was bad, and no sooner had I landed than the boat I had taken was destroyed by fierce winds. I became seriously ill, however, and the Prefect's physician had to be summoned to attend me. When I returned I was still so weak that I had to move into a hotel.

The Sixty-fifth Year (1610-1611)

In the seventh month of that autumn, while I was again living on the riverboat awaiting the Court's decision, the official in charge of investigating my case came to me to review my testimony. While he was with me, the Court unexpectedly handed down a guilty verdict. The official doubted the truth of this verdict and, on his own authority, went to Cao Ji to interrogate the monks who had brought the charge against me. He also examined the vouchers of every transaction I had made and determined that not a single penny of the sums entrusted to me had been improperly spent. Finding no evidence whatsoever of embezzlement or misappropriation, he reversed the Court's decision.

This reversal caused the authorities to initiate an investigation into the monks' true motives for having brought such false charges against me in the first place. To deliberately file false charges and then to give perjured testimony were capital offenses. When the conspiracy against me was exposed, I did my best to save the monks' lives; but the authorities were far too outraged by this attempt to abuse the judicial system.

Though I was repeatedly asked to return to Cao Ji, I had not the heart or strength to do so. Instructing my disciple Bhiksu Huai Yu, to take over my position at the monastery, I left for Guangzhou.

The Sixty-sixth Year (1611-1612)

That spring, in the third month, I went to Ding Hu Mountain in the Duan Zhou District to recuperate from my illness and to regain my strength. While convalescing, I was able to discourse on the Dharma with followers and scholars. I was also able to write *Clarifying Doubts About The Great Teaching*.

The Sixty-seventh Year (1612-1613)

During this year I stayed at Chang Chun Temple where I lectured on *The Shraddhotpada Shastra (The Awakening of Faith)*, *The*

Eight Parjnanas and *The Hundred Divisions*. Because many of my students had difficulty in understanding my essay, *Applauding The Lotus Sutra*, I wrote an additional commentary in order to resolve their difficulties.

The Sixty-eighth Year (1613-1614)

This summer I initiated a series of lectures on *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*, but by the time I reached the mid-point of the series, a huge abscess had developed on my back. Many treatments and medicines were given, but the infection did not respond, and my condition worsened. I grew so weak that Commander Wang Han Chung actually began to prepare for my funeral. Then my luck changed.

One day, an alcoholic named Liang Xing Shan, who happened to be an expert in the treatment of my particular affliction, unexpectedly came to call upon me. He examined my abscess, pronounced it serious but curable and proceeded to treat it with his own herbal concoction. Miraculously, my condition improved and by the winter I was completely healed. I wrote him a letter expressing my gratitude.

Of course, this abscess was a recurrence of the one I had when I was twenty. At that time I had regarded this affliction as retribution for some unremembered sin. In atonement and to effect a cure, I had prayed and recited *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. Thereafter, whenever the abscess recurred, I would recite the Sutra until the infection subsided. For forty-eight years I suffered from this condition, and throughout these years, I was always able to control it with the power of prayer. But ultimately, the karmic debt remained unpaid, it was evident that I still had not atoned for that ancient sin.

In the tenth month, when I was well again, I received a letter from Zeng Jin Jian asking me to retire with him and Nan Yue. He and I had been corresponding for more than ten years and frequently we had discussed the possibility of retiring to Nan Yue when the proper time came. Feeling now that the time had indeed come, I packed my bags and headed towards Nan Yue.

When I first came to Guangdong, dozens of disciples followed me there. But as time passed, they gradually dispersed and only a few bhiksus remained in permanent residence with me. Bhiksus Tong Chiung, Zhao Yi, and three of my attendants accompanied me to Hu Dong. A few days after I arrived, my disciple Fu Shan and my attendant Xin Guang who had both been visiting their parents in the north, also came to join me.

The Sixty-ninth Year (1614-1615)

That spring, in the first month, I visited De Shan Mountain and wrote four poems on this occasion. Later, I visited Upasaka Feng Yuan Cheng at Wu Ling where I wrote more poetry. Upasaka Feng and some of his friends kindly gave donations for the restoration of Tan Hua vihara. At Chu Ling, Prince Yong invited me to a vegetarian feast, and at Da Shan Temple, the monks requested me to lecture on and give the precepts.

That summer, in the fourth month, I returned to Hu Dong. There, upon learning of the Empress Mother's death, I held a funeral service to repay the debt of gratitude that I owed her. Notice of the ceremony was given by Imperial proclamation.

Ever since my days at Dong Hai, I had planned to write a commentary called *A Thorough Explanation of the Surangama Sutra*; but I had never found the time to do it. Finally, in the fifth month of that summer, I began to write the commentary; and in fifty days, I completed it.

In the eleventh month, when Tan Hua vihara was restored, I stayed at the mountain and wrote more poetry.

The Seventieth Year (1615-1616)

That spring I gave lectures on my Surangama Sutra commentary. In the summer I rewrote my commentary called *A Thorough Explanation of the Lotus Sutra*, and after that, I lectured on *The Awakening of Faith* and wrote a commentary on it.

That autumn in the eighth month, I visited Nan Yue Mountain and climbed Zhu Yong peck during the mid-autumn festival.

On the ninth day of the ninth month, Upasaka Feng Yuan Cheng, who had been transferred from Wu Ling to the command of Hu Nan, invited me to visit Fang Guang Temple with him.

Inspector Wu Sheng Bai also came to see me to discuss my commentary on *The Surangama Sutra*. He was so pleased with the manuscript that he and some of his subordinates donated money to have it printed. Additionally, he commissioned an artist to produce an illustrated album of eighty-eight Buddhas. He asked me to write a tribute to each of these Buddhas and I happily complied. After Upasaka Feng had settled into his new command, he invited me again to visit Jiu Yi Mountain.

In the tenth month, I arrived in the Ling Ling district where I stayed at Yu Ji for the winter.

The Seventy-first Year (1616-1617)

In spring, in the first month, I returned to Hu Dong and learned that the body of Master Da Guan, my old Dharma friend, was going to be ceremonially cremated sometime near the end of the year. Immediately after his death, Master Da Guan's body had been placed in a coffin which my disciple Da Yi had carried to Jing Shan so that his disciples and fellow monks could pay their respects to him at Zhi Zhao An. Twelve years had passed and I had still not gone there to pay my own respects to him. With shame, I acknowledged that I had not even sent incense or condolences. Now I learned of the impending cremation ceremony and the formal interment of the funerary urn. I decided that nothing would prevent me from attending the ceremony.

Also in the spring there was a succession ceremony at Hua Yue Temple which I attended. I went to Mei Xue Hall and paid my respects to Chan Master Shun An.

That summer, in the fourth month, I arrived at Wu Chang where, after prostrating myself before the great statue of the Buddha, I visited Jiu Feng.

In the sixth month, I arrived at Xue Yang and visited Dong Lin Temple where I wrote a poem in honor of the ancients. I then climbed Kuang Lu Mountain and paid my respects to late Master Qie Hong.

While staying on the Jin Zhu plateau to get away from the summer heat, I wrote a commentary on *Zhao Lun*. The scenery was so fantastically beautiful that I decided I ought to think about building myself a little retirement home there.

In the seventh month, I visited Gui Zong and climbed Gold Wheel Peak where, writing a poem to mark the occasion, I paid reverence to Sarira Stupa.

At that time, a monk kindly offered me Wu Yu hall to use for a retreat and I went up to look at the place. Even though the hall was rather small, the scenery was spectacular, and I accepted his offer. A scholar named Jiang Lai Ci, who had been a disciple of Master Da Guan, offered to donate money to finance my retirement there. Advisor Chen Chi Shi also came to visit me and when he learned that I intended to retire there, he took a vow to act as Dharma Protector.

That autumn in the eighth month, I left Kuang Shan mountain, going to Huang Mei where I paid reverence to the Fourth and Fifth Chan Patriarchs. I also went to Zi Yun Shan and stayed there for ten days so that I could visit with Prefect Wang who had kindly offered to build a vihara on Kuang Shan for me. After leaving Prefect Wang, I went to Xiang Cheng where Wu Guan Wo and Wu Ben Ru also offered to build a temple for me if I wanted to retire there. Later, I visited Fu Shan and crossed the river to climb Jiu Hua Mountain.

Early in the tenth month, I arrived at Tung Chan temple at Jin Sha where I met with Upasakas Yun, Wang, and Sun. I then left for Shuang Jing Mountain. Passing through Wu Jiang where Upasaka Yen Sheng and his followers invited me to dinner and gave me money to defray my travel expenses.

On the fifteenth day of the eleventh month, I arrived at Zhi Zhao Temple, and on the nineteenth day, I performed the funeral services for the cremation of Master Da Guan's remains. In loving memory of him, I wrote a eulogy. On the twenty-fifth day, I personally put his ashes in an urn and supervised the placing of the urn in the Manjusri tower. In Master Da Guan's honor, my disciple Fa Kai erected a stupa, for which I wrote the memorial inscription. All that I did was but a small measure of the loyalty I owed my true Dharma friend.

I stayed on to pass the New Year and wrote *The Importance of Chan Practice* for the monks there. Since Fa Kai had asked about the Dharmalakshana teachings, I wrote *The Relationship of Noumenal and Phenomenal*. I answered all inquiries I received about the Dharma. I also wrote *The Song of the Placard Carrier*.

Song of the Placard Carrier

Preface by Han Shan

Since the days when Da Hui revived Lin Ji's methods and transmitted his Chan doctrine in the Dharma Cave on Jin Shan Mountain, each new generation that received the Doctrine flourished and raised our sect to new heights of accomplishments. Sadly, this great tradition has dwindled. The pathway to the Dharma Cave has become overgrown with weeds. It is hidden now from view.

Those who practice Chan must gather in the wilderness, far away from Da Hui's guidance. Without a teacher, they fall into error. Many think that their first experience of enlightenment has brought them safely to the end of the struggle. Having no Master to correct this assumption, they persist in regarding this single experience as their crowning achievement. They will not remove their crown in order to bow to the Dharma. But a single experience is not a crown, it is a yoke. So dangerous is a little knowledge when it seduces the believer into burdensome ignorance! Truly it is said: it is easier to walk on thorny ground than it is to turn one's face away from moonlight.

Those who achieve success by the lightning flash of chance can lay no claim to wisdom. The insight gained becomes a toy, a trifle of shadows to be played with in memory. They cease to practice, finding no further need of it. In their leisure, they slip into worldly ways, calling others to follow.

To correct their error, to warn them of danger, and encourage them to be steadfast in their pursuit of that true and distant goal, I have written *The Song of the Placard Carrier*:

The Song of the Placard Carrier

Huckster!! False Advertiser!! Deceiver and deceived! That big placard is so heavy in your arms you can't think about anything but how you're going to keep on holding it up. You haven't even noticed how your ankles are shackled.

You struggled towards a moment of clarity; but when you got there you announced your arrival with a sign so big you couldn't see what else lay before you. So that other people can see your advertisement, you obstruct your own view.

The blank side is all you can see. In its blankness your imagination draws a thousand things. You sketch a building and think you are walking towards a Deva palace. You see lightning in a cloudless sky. Whether your eyes are opened or closed, you see nothing but illusion.

Drop your sign! You're carrying around a rotting toad! You can't sell fish eyes for pearls!

That sign is a cangue on your neck. You're in the stocks and you won't get anywhere until you free yourself from those confining bonds.

Once free, you can follow a good road. The way is easy and as plain and level as a balanced scale. Don't stop at any sideshows and you'll enter the Imperial City in no time at all.

Move on! Move on! Your legs will carry you. You won't need to be reborn as a horse, a camel, or a donkey.

Throw that heavy sign away! It's an unfurled sail that obeys the wind. You have to put all your energy into controlling it.

It's a huge mirror that reflects only worldly things. Drop it and shatter the great earth, the mountains, and the rivers. In a broken piece you'll find a reflection of your Buddha Self. Then, when you look again, all the pieces will reflect that Self, an image infinitely produced. Seek the Infinite and turn your back towards the Gate of Death.

The Seventy-second Year (1617-1618)

That spring, in the first month, I went to Shuang Jing Mountain to pay my respects to the late Master Yun Qi.

More than a thousand monks and lay disciples were waiting for me when I arrived. All were so eager to learn about Chan that I was truly puzzled. I had always regarded Master Yun Qi as an accomplished Chan master and wondered why his disciples should know so little about Chan. I then learned that he had confined his instruction to the methods of the Pure Land Sect. I suspected that the reason he had done this was his fear that he would expose his disciples to the terrible dangers of incomplete enlightenment. Chan was in decline and the few Chan masters who remained were all aware of this. They feared that once they departed this world, they would not be replaced by other masters who could lead their followers on to the True Destination.

When his disciples came to me enthusiastically asking question after question about the methods of our sect, I answered them fully, even though I was aware of the risk involved.

Then one evening when they were all assembled, I told them what a fine Chan master their Master had been and how, no doubt out of love for them, he had declined to expose them to the bitterness of failure. Many were moved to tears to learn this. Master Yun Qi had given them no hint that he had achieved so much.

After spending three weeks with Master Yun Qi's disciples, I traveled to Jing Ci Temple in order to lecture on *Mahayana Precepts*. Thousands of people attended these lectures and it was deeply gratifying to see so many virtuous people gather by the lakeside to learn about the Dharma.

I then journeyed to several beautiful places: Ling Yin, San Zhu, and Xi Shan where I was pleased to observe the Fish-Freeing service. In order to demonstrate their consideration for all living things, the Buddhists there would purchase fish that had been caught and liberate them during this ceremony.

In the fifth month, I arrived at Wu Hu. There Officer Liu Yu Shou invited me to stay with him so that we could discuss some remarkable dreams he had been having.

When I returned to Kuang Shan, I found that Perfect Wang had already given money for the construction of a vihara. I therefore instructed my disciple Fu Shan to supervise the construction. The building was completed by the end of the tenth month and thus I had both a dwelling and a suitable place for giving lectures. My first topic was *The Surangama Sutra*.

The Seventy-third Year (1618-1619)

This year I devoted myself to the task of repairing the Buddha Shrine Hall and the Chan Hall. In the third month, counselor Chen Chi Shi of Fu Liang came to the mountain and with the help of Bao Zong Su formed a committee of ten friends to raise the necessary funds. In the twelfth month of that winter, the repairs were finally completed.

The Seventy-fourth Year (1619-1620)

That spring, in the first month, I started reciting *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. Each time I recited it I found more to admire. But while favored this instructive scripture, others, including my disciples, found it too long. I complied with their requests to lecture on my *Commentary on The Lotus Sutra*, *The Surangama Sutra*, *The Awakening of Faith*, *The Diamond Sutra*, *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* and *The Vijnaptimatrasiddhi Shastra*. Still, I regretted that no one ever requested *The Avatamsaka Sutra*.

In autumn, in the seventh month, I made the necessary arrangements to create a home for wandering monks who had reached the age of retirement. I remembered the time when I was a boy and several of these monks had called at my home looking for a meal. My mother had treated them so reverently when she gave them food; and I had been inspired by their holiness. I had often wondered what these monks, who were not attached to any monastery, would do when they became too old to go about begging for substance. Now I could give them a place to live.

On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, I went into seclusion in order to meditate. Following the method of Dharma Master Hui Yuan, I used incense sticks to measure time and concentrated on repeating the Buddha's name in the manner of the Pure Land School. But no matter how I tried to keep my mind on the Buddha's name, my mind would become filled with worry about the fate of *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. Everyone complained that Dharma Master Qing Liang's commentary was too difficult to understand and that the Sutra's complexity and length made it's profound meaning impossible to find. I resolved, therefore, to write a condensed commentary entitled *The Essentials of the Avatamsaka Sutra* in which I would present a general idea of the Sutra's meaning. This would help readers to understand and appreciate the Sutra.

During my seclusion, I began the outline of this work.

The Seventy-fifth Year (1620-1621)

In the spring of the first month, I came out of seclusion, and complied with my attendant Guang Yi's request that I explain again *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* and *The Awakening of Faith*. He also asked me to lecture on *The Seven Chapters of Zhuang Zi Metaphysics* which I happily did.

That summer I began to suffer problems with my feet. The pain was often intense. While I was convalescing, Provincial Inspector Wu, who had been transferred to the post of Chief Justice of Guangdong, went to Cao Ji to pay reverence to the Sixth Patriarch. He was so impressed by the repairs and renovations I had made to the monastery buildings that he announced his intention to become Dharma Protector of Cao Ji. Accordingly, he wanted detailed biographical accounts of all the Patriarchs and asked the monks there to request me to compose them. During my illness, I wrote these accounts, complete with appropriate eulogies.

Cao Ji was something else that I couldn't get out of my mind. Eight years had passed since my sorrowful departure from the Sixth Patriarch's beautiful monastery. Often I had received requests from the monks there to come back and live with them again. Even members of the local gentry and some officials, too, had written, asking me to return but I had always refused.

Now, Chief Justice Wu also wrote to me asking that I return to Cao Ji, but this time I was able to refuse this request on the grounds that I was simply too ill to travel.

The Seventy-sixth Year (1621-1622)

In the summer I lectured on the *Commentary on The Lankavatara Sutra* and in the winter, once again, I was asked to return to Cao

Ji. This time, Superintendent Zhu and Chief Justice Wu came personally to formally request my return. Again I declined because of my illness.

The Seventy-seventh Year (1622-1623)

I continued my work on *The Essentials of the Avatamsaka Sutra* and was finally able to complete it.

Again Chief Justice Wu wrote to me expressing his sincere desire that I returned to Cao Ji to retire. This time, at the request of Official Chang of Shao Yang, his letter was delivered to me by the abbot of Cao Ji Temple. Knowing that I could no longer decline the invitation, I agreed to return to Cao Ji. And on the tenth day of the eleventh month, I left Kuang Shan.

During my return journey, I wrote poetry and met with many old friends. It was such a happy journey that, as I crossed Da Yu Peak, I thought my heart could not contain more joy; but then, on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month, I arrived at Cao Ji. And when I saw the lines of people eagerly waiting to welcome and embrace me, my heart overflowed with happiness.

Master Han Shan's autobiography ends here

Master stayed in the Chan Hall at Cao Ji. During the first month of his return he devoted himself to expounding the Dharma. Many officials, gentry, disciples and followers of all kinds came to Cao Ji to pay their respects to him and to listen to his wise instructions.

That autumn, in the eighth month, Master summoned an attendant to carry an expression of gratitude to Chief Justice Su. As the attendant started to leave, Master said, “Good results can come only when the time is right. When the Buddhas and Patriarchs preached the Truth, they succeeded because people were ready to listen to it. If the cause is noble and the time propitious, the work will succeed. My lifetime’s work is over; it’s time for me to go back.” People who heard him thought he wanted to tell Chief Justice Wu that he intended to go back to Kuang Shan Mountain. Master Han Shan then wrote a poem entitled *Mid-autumn Without Moonlight*. Since the moon is particularly bright in mid-autumn, we understood that he was saying that very soon death would close his eyes.

On the fourth day of the tenth month, district Magistrate Xiao Xuan Pu came to visit master. The two of them chatted happily for the entire day. But Master’s condition was clearly weakening, and when he asked Magistrate Xiao to select a suitable gravesite for him, the Magistrate immediately promised to do so.

After the Magistrate departed, Master began to sicken. On the sixth day of the month, his attendant Guang Yi returned and, after seeing Master, said that he had returned just in time. That same day, Official Chang brought a physician. Master knew his time was near and that medicines were useless. He thanked the physician but declined his help.

On the eighth day of the month, disciple Zhao Yi arrived. After he came out from visiting Master he said that if he had arrived two days later, he surely would have come too late.

On the eleventh day of the month. Master said goodbye to Official Chang. Then after bathing, he burned incense and instructed his disciples for the last time. “All worldly things are impermanent. Keep your minds fixed always on Buddha,” he said.

Hearing this, Disciple Guang Yi cried, “Master, we need more guidance!”

Master Han Shan scolded him. “You have been my disciple for so long,” he said sadly. “Why are you still confused? Have you learned nothing?” Then Master sighed and said, “When the proclamations that come from the (Buddha’s) Golden Mouth are regarded as old and worthless news, what value can my words have?” He refused to speak again.

On the twelfth day of the tenth month, which was Master Han Shan’s birthday, many Buddhist followers gathered at the monastery. Prefect Chang came bringing a purple silk robe as a birthday gift. He and Master chatted during the afternoon and in the evening, when the prefect withdrew, Master bathed.

The following morning, wearing his new silk robe, he received the Prefect saying, “The old monk of the mountain is leaving. Thank you for the protection you have given the Dharma.”

Prefect Chang, in tears, protested. “You are not going to leave! I am the boss of this region and I say that you may not leave!”

Master smiled and again thanked the Prefect.

At noon, after the Prefect departed, Master bathed for the last time as the monks assembled, chanting the Buddha’s name. After he put on fresh garments, he received the monks, saying “Don’t be frightened. Follow the Buddhist custom; no grieving, no weeping. And with one mind repeat the Buddha’s name.”

In the middle of the afternoon, still sitting upright, Master Han Shan quietly died. The birds of Cao Ji cried mournfully, echoing our sorrow.

When the monks of Kuang Shan Mountain learned of Master’s death, they petitioned several high officials to order that the remains be returned to them. This order was issued and Master Han Shan’s body was placed in a coffin and, on the twenty-first day of the first month (February 1625), was taken from Cao Ji.

At Kuang Shan Mountain, Bhiksu Fu Shan erected a stupa hall in which the coffin was placed so that all could come and pay their respects to the Master. Later, Prefect Chien Wu Xin of Nan Kang selected a gravesite in a shady but wet place, and the coffin was interred. Eleven years later, the mountain was infested with tigers. People grumbled that this misfortune had been caused by the

failure of the monks to bury the Master's remains in a proper site. The coffin was then disinterred at which time it was discovered that much of the wood had been eaten by ants. No one wanted to place the coffin in the ground again and so it was left in the stupa.

After another nine years had passed (1643), the minister of rite Chen Tzu Chuang of Ling Na, who had been the Master's disciple, sent money and a formal letter requesting that the remains be returned to Cao Ji.

Though the damage to the coffin was extensive, the Master's remains were still intact. He still sat upright in the Lotus posture. It was decided to follow the Indian custom of plastering the body with sandalwood dust, making it appear to have been lacquered.

Years earlier, when Master Han Shan had lived in Cao Ji, a seamstress, who was one of his devoted followers, made him a magnificent silk robe which she had embroidered a thousand Buddhas, each set in the niche of appliquéd silk. The master died before she could complete the robe, and so he had never gotten to see it. It was reverently stored in the monastery treasure room.

At last, the monks at Cao Ji were able to place this splendid robe upon his body. The Master was then enshrined in Han Shan Hall where thousands came to venerate him.

Maxims of Master Han Shan

(from Journey to Dreamland)

1. When we preach the Dharma to those who see only the ego's illusory world, we preach in vain. We might as well preach to the dead.

How foolish are they who turn away from what is real and true and lasting and instead pursue the fleeting shapes of the physical world, shapes that are mere reflections in the ego's mirror. Not caring to peer beneath the surfaces, deluded beings are content to snatch at images. They think that the material world's ever-flowing energy can be modified into permanent forms, that they can name and value these forms, and then, like great lords, exert dominion over them.

Material things are like dead things and the ego cannot vivify them. As the great lord is by his very identity attached to his kingdom, the ego, when it attaches itself to material objects, presides over a realm of the dead. The Dharma is for the living. The permanent cannot abide in the ephemeral. True and lasting joy can't be found in the ego's world of changing illusion. No one can drink the water of a mirage.

2. There are also those who, claiming enlightenment, insist that they understand the non-substantial nature of reality. Boasting that the disease of materialism cannot infect them, they try to prove their immunity by carefully shunning all earthly enjoyments. But they, too, are in the dark.
3. Neither are they correct who dedicate themselves to exposing the fraud of every sensory object they encounter. True, perceptions of material objects give rise to wild desire in the heart. True, once it is understood how essentially worthless such apparent objects are, wild desires are reduced to timid thoughts. But we may not limit our spiritual practice to the discipline of dispelling illusion. There is more to the Dharma than understanding the nature of reality.
4. What is the best way to sever our attachment to material things?

First, we need a good sharp sword, a sword of discrimination, one that cuts through appearance to expose the real. We begin by making a point of noticing how quickly we became dissatisfied with material things and how soon our sensory pleasures also fade into discontent. With persistent awareness we sharpen and hone this sword. Before long, we find that we seldom have to use it. We've cut down all old desires and new ones don't dare to bother us.

5. True Dharma seekers who live in the world use their daily activity as a polishing tool. Outwardly they may appear to be very busy, like flint striking steel, making sparks everywhere. But inwardly they silently grow. For although they may be working very hard, they are working for the sake of the work and not for the profits it will bring them. Unattached to the results of their labor, they transcend the frenetic to reach the Way's essential tranquillity. Doesn't a rough and tumbling stream also sparkle like striking flints – while it polishes into smoothness every stone in its path?
6. In the ego's world of illusion, all things are in flux. But continuous change is constant chaos. When the ego sees itself as the center of so much swirling activity, it cannot experience cosmic harmony.

For example, what the ego considers to be a devastating hurricane is, as far as the universe is concerned, a perfectly natural event, a link in the endless chain of cause and effect. The universe, having no ego, continues its existence without rendering judgments about hurricanes or ocean breezes.

When we are empty of ego we, too, can carry on in calm acceptance of life's varying events. When we cease making prejudicial distinctions – gentle or harsh, beautiful or ugly, good or bad – a peaceful stillness will permeate our mind. If there is no ego, there is no agitation.

7. Our mind and body are by nature pure; but we sully them with sinful thoughts and deeds. In order to restore ourselves to our original purity, we need only to clean away the accumulated dirt. But how do we proceed with the cleansing process? Do we put a barrier between us and the occasions of our bad habits? Do we remove ourselves from the places of temptation? No. We cannot claim victory by avoiding the battle. The enemy is not our surroundings, it is in ourselves. We have to confront ourselves and try to understand our human weakness. We have to take an honest look at ourselves, at our relationships and our possessions, and ask what all our self-indulgence has gotten us. Has it brought us happiness? Surely not.

If we are ruthlessly honest we'll have to admit that it was our own foolish egotism that soiled us. This admission is painful to make. Well, if we want to melt ice we have to apply heat. The hotter the fire, the quicker the ice melts. So it is with wisdom. The more intense our scrutiny, the quicker we will attain wisdom. When we grow large in wisdom we dwarf our old

egotistical self. The contest is then over.

8. There are times when we act with unshakable faith in the Dharma even though we don't understand the situation we're in. There are other times when we understand our situation but are afraid to be completely faithful.

In one instance, we have heart; and in the other we have mind. We must put these two together! Understanding AND faith!

9. With one small fulcrum, a lever can move tons of weight. With one greedy thought, years of integrity can be corrupted. A greedy thought is the seed of fear and confusion. It will grow wildly. The material gain that a greedy act brings is a small gain indeed. To act without greed and lose some material benefit is also, therefore a small loss. But to lose one's integrity! That is an immense loss! The enlightened person stands in awe of the fulcrum.

10. What do people strive for? Money, or fame, or successful relationships, or the Dharma. Well, one man may become very rich but be hated by his family. Another man may be loved by everyone but not have a penny to his name. Still a third man may be hailed as a hero by his countrymen and then find himself with neither funds nor loving family. Usually, so much effort is put into achieving one goal, that the other goals cannot be attained. But what about the man who strives to attain the Dharma? If he succeeds he has gained in that one goal far more than the other three combined. He who has Dharma lacks nothing.

11. Put a fish on land and he will remember the ocean until he dies. Put a bird in a cage, yet he will not forget the sky. Each remains homesick for his true home, the place where his nature has decreed that he should be.

Man is born in the state of innocence. His original nature is love and grace and purity. Yet he emigrates so casually without even a thought of his old home. Is this not sadder than the fishes and the birds?

12. Those who pursue money are always rushed, always busy with urgent matters. Those who pursue the Dharma, go slow and easy. "Boring" you say? Maybe. Maybe it's downright dreary to stop and smell a flower or listen to a bird. Maybe a glint of gold is really more dazzling than the sight of one's Original Face. Maybe what we need is a better definition of "treasure".

13. The heart's weather should always be clear, always sunny and calm. The only time the weather could turn bad is when clouds of lust and attachment form. These always bring storms of worry and confusion.

14. A single speck in the eye blurs good vision, we see double or triple images. A single dirty thought confounds a rational mind. Many errors in judgment can arise from it. Remove that speck and see clearly! Remove that dirty thought and think clearly!

15. Great accomplishments are composed of minute details. Those who succeed in attaining the Whole have attended carefully to each tiny part. Those who fail have ignored or taken too lightly what they deemed to be insignificant. The enlightened person overlooks nothing.

16. Why are certain material objects so treasured? A gem is virtually useless and a gilded scabbard is no better than a plain one.

Man decides that gold is valuable because it is rare and enduring and brilliant. He then thinks that if he possesses gold he, himself, will become rare or unique, that his individual worth will endure, and that he also will be considered a rather brilliant fellow. So obsessed he may become with these foolish notions that in trying to obtain gold, he will destroy the very life he is trying to embellish.

In the darkness of delusion the unenlightened believe that they can glorify themselves by reflecting the qualities they have assigned to their possessions. Those who live the enlightened life readily discern that the qualities of an object are not transferred to its possessor. A heap of treasures piled in their path will not obstruct their vision. They can see right through them. Gold in the pocket is not gold in the character.

17. Look at people who keep tigers as pets. Even while they're laughing and playing with them, in the back of their minds they're afraid their pet will suddenly turn on them. They never forget how dangerous tigers are.

But what about people who lust after possessions, indulging themselves with one acquisition after another. They remain completely unaware of any danger.

Yet, the tiger can eat only a man's flesh. Greed can devour his soul.

18. It is easier to do the right thing when we know what the right thing to do is. We can't rely on instinct to find the Way. We need guidance.

But once we're shown the path and begin to climb it, we find that with each step up we grow in wisdom and fortitude. Looking down we see how many of our old desires have fallen dead on the wayside. They look so feeble lying there that we wonder why we ever thought we lacked the courage to resist them.

The Mountain of Wisdom is different from other mountains. The higher we climb the stronger we grow.

19. People are always looking for the easy way. The hard way – the way learned by difficult experience and painful realizations – doesn't interest them. They want a short-cut. True Dharma seekers are afraid of short-cuts. They know better. They know that without effort, there's no sense of accomplishment. It's that sense that keeps them going.

People who don't appreciate the struggles of climbing lack understanding of where they've been, awareness of who they are, and determination to continue climbing. That's why they never attain the Dharma.

20. What are the two most common goals for people who live in the world? Wealth and fame. To gain these goals people are willing to lose everything, including the health of their body, mind and spirit. Not a very good exchange, is it? Worldly wealth and fame fade so quickly that we wonder which will last longer, the money, the fame or the man.

But consider the goal of enlightenment, of attaining the wealth of the Dharma. Those who reach this goal are vigorous in body, keen in mind, and serene in spirit...right into eternity.

21. There are people who, though having accomplished nothing, connive to receive great honors or high positions of authority. Well, people who gain high rank without having earned it are like rootless trees. They live in fear that even the slightest wind will topple them.

Undeserved honor is a preface to disgrace.

22. The rich are admired because they've saved money. But what's been saved can be spent. The admiration goes with the money. A king receives loyalty because his people regard him as noble. If they decide he's acting badly, he may lose more than his throne. Those who are rich in the Dharma and noble in the Buddha's Way always retain – their wealth and the fealty of the people.

23. By successfully concealing his crimes a person can't consider himself honorable. He knows he's done wrong. By constantly bragging a person can't claim to be famous even though he does hear his name mentioned everywhere he goes. By affecting the manners of holy men monks may receive veneration, but a pious demeanor never made anyone a saint. What are true honor, true recognition and true piety? They are internal qualities, not superficial acts or appearances. When a man's conscience is free from stain, he is honorable. When his reputation for integrity precedes him, he is famous. When humility and reverence for the Dharma flow naturally out of his character, he is esteemed.

24. If men can't evade the demands of their father and emperor, what can they do when Death gives them an order? They protest bitterly and scream at heaven, but they've got to obey. The man who howls the loudest is the one who thinks he's just reached the pinnacle of worldly success.

The enlightened understand life and death. They always live well and never complain.

25. People think that if they possess worldly knowledge they know everything. But that's not correct. Even when subjects are mastered there's always room for error. And if the finest archers can miss their targets occasionally, what about the mediocre ones? When we know the Dharma, we have all the information we need. No matter what the other facts we acquire additionally, our storehouse of knowledge, though very deep and wide, is already full.

26. Everything in the universe is subject to change. There's only one exception: death always follows life. Isn't strange that people haven't noticed this, that they conduct their lives as though they're going to live forever, that death is nothing to worry about? Of course if they really want to live as long as they obviously expect, they'd better pursue the Dharma. Life, death, and change itself are transcended in the Dharmakaya.

27. I glean what the harvesters have overlooked or rejected. So why are their baskets empty while mine is bursting with so much good food? They just didn't recognize their Buddha Nature when they saw it.

Everything in life depends on the choices we make.

28. In polite society everybody notices if a man's hands are dirty. He'll be stared at contemptuously. Why, the fellow will be wretched until he can wash his hands.

But isn't it funny how a man can have character that's defiled by greed and hate and nobody will pay the slightest attention? He'll move about in perfect ease. Evidently, a dirty character isn't worthy of notice as a dirty hand.

It's so simple to restore dirty hands to a state of purity. Just wash them. But what about corrupted character? That's quite another problem...

29. If a man carries too many worldly burdens, his body will soon wear out. If he worries about too many worldly problems, his mind will soon collapse. To be so occupied with material things is a dangerous way to live, a foolish waste of energy. A man ought to simplify his needs and use his strength to attain spiritual goals. Nobody ever ruined his mind or body by exercising self-restraint.

30. What, ultimately, is the difference between hardship and pleasure? A hardship is an obstacle and an obstacle is a challenge and a challenge is a way to use one's Dharma strength. What is more pleasurable than that?

People are always so afraid of hardship. They go through life trying to avoid the difficult and embrace the easy. For me, it's just the opposite. I don't discriminate at all between hardship and pleasure. Whether the path ahead of me is difficult or easy, I don't have hesitate to follow it.

31. People indignantly condemn thieves to steal material goods. I worry about the kind of thief who steals souls. People act to protect their property. They build walls and install security systems. They hang every thief they catch. What measures do they take to protect their minds from corruption and loss?

32. A man with good character is gentle, humble and free of material desires. A man with bad character is harsh, proud, and enslaved by greed. Gentleness indicates greater strength than harshness. Humility is more admirable than insolence. Freedom is always preferred to slavery.

It's obvious. A man with good character has a better life.

33. There are material gains and spiritual gains. To gain the material objects of its desire, the mind searches the external world. When it seeks spiritual gains, it turns its attention to the heart.

A person ignores his heart becomes attached to the material world. The Dharma seeker looks inward and attends to his heart. That's where he wants to form attachments.

34. You can't be comfortable if you've got splinters in your skin. Worse, if you don't get them out, the skin becomes infected. Infected skin becomes necrotic.

It's the same with the heart. You can't be comfortable if splinters of greed are stuck in it. And if you don't get them out, your heart becomes infected. What will you do if your spirit dies?

35. A natural disaster, a so-called Act of God, doesn't discriminate between its victims. It damages everybody – rich and poor, good and bad.

Whenever you have power over people, keep natural disasters in mind. Be godlike in your fairness.

36. The best way to convert other people to the Dharma Way, is to convert yourself to it first. Be an example for them to follow. One natural act flowing out of good character is more convincing than the most eloquent speech.

37. It's easier to go from poverty to luxury than it is to go from luxury to poverty. Everybody knows that. Poverty is like being tossed around in troubled water. If a person is alert, he can find a way out. But luxury is like drifting gently in a river current. He'll fall asleep and won't wake up until he's in the ocean. Welcome hardship. Regard rain as so much morning dew. Be afraid of sunny days. It's hard to climb with the blazing sun on your back.

38. Our Buddha Nature is always clear and bright. If we can't see because our eyes are darkly veiled with emotional dust. We can't clean dust with dust and we can't calm emotions with emotions. So how do we remove that veil? We use Dharma wisdom. Enlightenment lifts the veil and illuminates our Buddha Face.

39. The great quality of wisdom is that it always responds with precisely what's needed. Like a well-aimed, sharp pointed sword – it always hits the spot. When we grow in wisdom we understand and can control our mind.

A wise person is always kind and considerate. He always sees what's needed. He lets snow flakes fall on an overheated body. He provides cool water to slake a desperate thirst.

40. The easy path is always so appealing. So why do I prefer the hard way? On the easy path we take things for granted. We get lazy and bored. This is a formula for trouble and loss. When we go the hard way, we know we can't let our guard down for a moment. We have to stay alert to meet the challenges. Solving problems makes our mind keener and our character stronger. This is achievement! This is true gain!

41. We all have a tendency to like those who listen to our advice and to dislike those who ignore it. We should guard ourselves against this tendency.

If we allow our emotions to influence us, we're guilty of ignoring the Dharma's advice. Love and hate can infect consciousness and jeopardize our ability to perceive clearly, to see with unprejudiced eyes. In the darkness we may stumble. When we control our emotions, we preserve the light.

42. People crave sensory stimulation. They enjoy this kind of external excitement. But I consider such craving a form of suffering. Sensory stimulation feeds on itself, grows larger and larger, and develops an ever-increasing appetite. People will destroy themselves and others, too, in trying to satisfy it. Pleasure derived from Dharma wisdom is internal excitement. Happiness grows along with the capacity to enjoy it. When given a choice between enjoyments, enlightened people always choose the Dharma.

43. Look, all worldly successes have their downside. The richer you become, the more pride you have. The higher your rank, the bossier you act. The greater your ambition, the more inconsiderate you are.

Success in the Dharma works differently. The better you become, the better you become.

44. Waves roughen the sea and windmill turn because of the wind. Take away the wind and the sea becomes calm and the windmills come to rest. For every effect there is a cause.

The waves of desire for things in the material world churn our minds, keep up in a constant state of agitation, scrambling in all directions. What do you think could happen if we eliminate desire?

45. The flow of a stream is sluggish if the source is shallow. A water-wheel won't turn in it. A tall building won't last if the foundation is shaky. Walls crack and soon the floors collapse. Depth and firmness are indispensable for good work and endurance. The saints knew this. That's why they rooted themselves deep in the Dharma. They became towers of goodness that nothing could topple. Their enlightenment was a beacon that guided and inspired others for generations.

Don't be content to study the Dharma, to memorize its surface. Plunge into it. Go as deeply as you can.

46. Limitless heaven and the huge earth are easily seen by the eye; but a tiny piece of lint can destroy that eye's vision. A heart filled with love can expand into the universe; but a single hateful thought can puncture that heart and let the love drain out. Never underestimate the power of small things. The saints always gave full consideration to the tiniest thoughts.

47. Even though a hundred persons of great erudition predict failure, the wise person who has confidence in his own abilities will persevere and succeed. Even if these same hundred persons predict success, the person who has only knowledge and not the self confidence born of wisdom will fail.

Book knowledge alone gives rise to doubts and doubts cause confusion. In such conditions, no self confidence can develop. But wisdom leads to trust and trust inspires insight and clear thinking. Dharma followers pursue the path of wisdom in order to eliminate doubt and put knowledge to good use.

48. Not too long ago, when a person fell into the gutter, he'd feel such shame that he'd vow with his blood to mend his way and

never fall again. Nowadays, when a person finds himself in the gutter he sends out invitations for others to come and join him. This is really sad, isn't it?

49. The only thing we can be sure of is that we can't be sure of anything. The only fact that doesn't change is the fact that all things constantly change. The saints cultivated patience. No matter what situation they found themselves in, they calmly waited. They also understood that in matters of the heart it's not the object alone that alters, but the subject, too, which proves fickle. Desire just might be the most changeable thing of all.
50. Cultivate the habit of going to sleep early. This is the best regimen for maintaining a strong and peaceful mind. People who stay up late need to show off and entertain their friends. Or else they're bored and need excitement. Even if they sleep late, they're still tired when they get up, still sluggish in body and mind. They can't work or think well at all. People who follow the Dharma lead fuller, richer lives. They don't need other people for support. Good habits are like muscles, the more they are exercised, the stronger they become.
51. All rivers, large or small, clear or muddy, flow into the ocean and the ocean responds by yielding vapors that become clouds which rain and fill the rivers. That is the cycle.

The saints show love and respect to all people, rich or poor, good or bad. The people, seeing such exquisite fairness, respond venerating the saints and trying to emulate them. This, too, is a cycle.

Regard the Dharma as a river regards the ocean, the source of its very nature and its endlessly renewing destiny. Regard the Dharma as saints regard the people, the object of love and the reward for loving.

52. If you treat other people as other, as separate, or as people different from yourself, you will not be inclined to be fair or merciful in your judgment of them. But if you treat other people as if they were just versions of yourself, you will understand their errors and appreciate their qualities.

Are we not fortunate that this is the way Heaven regards earth.

53. If one sees only superficial forms of matter and does not penetrate the true nature of visual reality, one is spiritually blind.

If one hears only temporary function of noise and does not penetrate to the true nature of auditory reality, one is spiritually deaf.

Forms and sounds are only illusions. We use vision and hearing to determine their essence to understand the true nature of reality.

54. The unstoppable stream of the ego's conscious thoughts cannot stay still long enough to comprehend the truth. Yet people are always trying to think up a barrier to the flow, to use thoughts to stop thinking. Thoughts are like wildcats. We would never use one wildcat to tame another.

How then do we enter the state of non-thought? We understand the non-substantial nature of both the one who thinks and the thought itself. We understand that in reality there is not even a single tiny thought of a thought, or a thinker either. When we bear witness to this reality, our own testimony liberates us from bondage of thoughts of having no thoughts.

55. The very nature of mind and body is clear and calm and possesses not a single thought. It is the ego that thinks just as it is the ego that thinks that it desires not to think. The ego causes problems it tries to solve. To be empty of ego is to hear the soundless sound, to see the invisible sight, to think the thoughtless thought.

56. When one reaches the state of the thoughtless thought, one thinks that he is awakened to the Dharma. He thinks about his meditation experience and how it will change his thoughts about his environment. He thinks that it is absolutely wonderful that he has controlled his mind. It wouldn't be right to say that he has more to think about. Actually, he has less.

57. The clearer the body, the brighter one's Buddha Nature shines. In the beginning, we still need the body. It's like a lamp. The Buddha Nature is this flame. But we may still be conscious of shadows. As we progress we feel that the body is the universe itself and that our Buddha Self shines throughout it like the sun.

58. There is no beginning to what came before, and no end to what will come after. It is thought that interrupts the flow of time and calibrates it. It is thought that decides that night follows day, that death follows life, that some things are tiny while

others are huge. What, to the universe, is big or large, bright or dark, future or past?

59. Acts are small; the Principle is great. Acts are various; the Principle is one. Those who live the Principle, who let its meaning flow through their very bloodstream, never act at variance with it. In whatever they do, they fulfill the Principle. Whether busy or at ease they are never deceitful, never manipulative. They have no hidden motives and need none.
60. Nothing in the world is gained without desire, without motivation. You can take the route of honesty and be sincere in the pursuit of your desire or you can take the route of deceit and get what you want under false pretenses. One way or the other, when you acquire the object of your desire you'll become attached to it – for at least as long as it takes you to desire something else. But between the routes of sincerity and guile lies a path in which neither strategy is necessary. This is the route that leads to understanding worldly desires for what they are. On this route your motivations die in their tracks while you move straightforwardly on.
61. When you think of a thing, you impart existence to it. Objects which cause desire to arise disappear when the mind's eye closes to them. They blend into the scenery.
- It is the same with emotions. Hopes, fears, judgments of right and wrong, and feelings of pleasure or misery also vanish when the mind remains uninvolved in the worldly events that occasioned them. When uncluttered by worldly refuse, the empty mind can hold infinite space. Peace pervades its purity, heaven gleams, and the harmony of the spheres resonates throughout.
62. The more people try to use willpower to obliterate a desire, the more they strengthen the desire. The additional force only serves to confuse them. They become obsessed with the problem. The more people talk about the Dharma without knowing what it is, the more they strengthen their ignorance. They grow in this ignorance and soon consider themselves towers of rectitude. They're like fish out of water who attempt to teach others to swim, or like caged birds who offer lessons in flying.
- If you want to conquer a desire, take off its mask and see it for what it is. Instantly, it becomes insignificant – not worth a second thought. If you want to discourse on the Dharma, let it become your natural habitat. Be at home in it. Familiarize yourself with human nature by recognizing your own errors and base desires. Instantly, you'll forgive others for their mistakes. Be humble and gentle in your love for humanity. That's the way to set an example for others to copy. Proud rigidity isn't rectitude. It's spiritual rigor mortis.
63. Those who are serious about the Dharma seek the insights of wisdom in everything they do. Whether busy or at rest, whether alone or in a crowd, in every situation they find themselves, they strive to remain consciously aware. Such vigilance isn't easy. But once they get used to the practice, it becomes so natural an activity that nobody around them even suspects what they are achieving.
64. If you subtract a single blade of grass from the universe, the universe can no longer be said to be all-inclusive. If you put one tiny thought of greed or lust into a pure mind, the mind can no longer claim to be undefiled.
- Be careful of small things. Their absence or presence can change everything.
65. The mind expands, into the universe; the body shrinks to mouse-like size. To be enlightened is to appreciate the dynamics of the Dharma.
- When the mind soars into boundless space, the body remains confined to earthly habitats. It is usually found scurrying around in the dark.
66. What a waste of time and energy it is to strive to obtain material objects of desire. No lasting satisfaction can result from acquiring them since by their very acquisition they have ceased to be objects of desire. They are consumed like firewood and "burnt offerings". We spit out the ashes in our mouths and search for another tree to cut down.
- The saints strove for spiritual insights. They questioned the meaning of life. Achieving this insight, they gained the universe. There being nothing else left to desire, they lit no sacrificial fires.
67. Vast as the universe is, it fits inside the mind. Small as the body is, there is not enough in creation to satisfy it.
68. Everything in the universe has One Nature. People who live in the Nature have all that they could possibly want. The

enlightened posses. The unenlightened desire.

69. The person who considers himself superior to others constantly renders judgments and perceives differences. He rigidly deals in opposites: good or bad, right or wrong. If he follows his own standards of fairness, he'll have to reject at least half of creation.
- A person who follows the Dharma strives to unify himself with the rest of humanity. He doesn't discriminate and is indifferent to qualitative distinctions. He knows that Buddha Nature is the One, Indivisible Reality. A person who follows the Dharma strives to remain ever-conscious of his inclusion in that One.
70. Mountains, rivers and the earth itself are parts of The One. The clear mind is transparent; all existence can be seen through it. The mind clouded by illusion of ego sees nothing but itself.
- Strive to realize that you are included in The One! Your body may dwell in the material world, but your mind will understand that there is nothing apart from itself that it can desire.
71. In the Dharma's perfect stillness, the heart perceives and understands everything. There are no words for the tongue to speak, no sound for the ear to hear, no sights for the eye to see. Those who live in the Dharma live in their hearts. It's strange that though their bodies may be decaying, their breath is always like a fragrant cool breeze. How wonderful it is to be near them!
72. I have learned so much from people who have been shunned by society. Yes, it's true. Take my advice. If you want to find good teachers, seek out those who have been rejected for being blind, deaf or ignorant.
73. The objects of the material world are the props, sets and characters of a dream-drama. When one awakens, the stage vanishes. The players and the audience too, disappear. Waking up is not death. What lives in a dream can die in a dream; but the dreamer has a real existence that doesn't perish with the dream. All that is necessary for him to stop dreaming, to cease being fascinated by dream images, and to realize that he has merely been a dreamer.
74. Most people only perceive change. To them things come in and out of existence. Sooner or later, what's new becomes old, what's valuable becomes worthless. Their egos determine the nature of destiny of everything
- When existence is defined in such finite, ephemeral terms, the power to control people and things is naturally seen as an exercise of ego. And why not? Isn't the ego an authority on the subject of change? Of course, when it comes to the One Thing That Never Changes, the ego is amazingly ignorant. Nowadays people don't appreciate the Changeless. They scramble to keep up with every fad and fashion. They're like comedians, desperately trying to acquire new jokes. Their lives depend on keeping the audience laughing.
- What's truly funny is their conviction that they're free, powerful and in control. In reality they're merely helpless slaves to an illusion.
75. There are two ways to perceive the Dharma: the Sudden Way, the way in which the obstacle of illusion is shattered by a striking awareness; and the Gradual Way, the way in which illusion is dispelled incrementally, by continuous effort. One way or the other the obstacle must be destroyed.
76. The Buddha Mind contains the universe. In this universe there is only one pure substance, one absolute and indivisible Truth. The notion of duality does not exist.
- The small mind contains only illusions of separateness, of division. It imagines myriad objects and defines truth in terms of relative opposites. Big is defined by small, good by evil, pure by defiled, hidden by revealed, full by empty. What is opposition? It is the arena of hostility, of conflict and turmoil. Where duality is transcended peace reigns. This is the Dharma's ultimate truth.
77. Though, in fact, the Dharma's Truth cannot be expressed in words, teachers talk on and on, trying to explain it. I suppose it's just human nature to say that something cannot be explained and then spend hours trying to explain it. No wonder people walk away. Well, we could be more entertaining. We could make up amusing stories and appeal to our audience with flattering assurances. Of course, we'd just be piling illusion upon illusion. But what would that have to do with the Dharma?
78. A person who is alone can't hold a conversation. A drum has to be hollow for its sound to reverberate. Absences count.

Words limit. Interpretations differ. What isn't said is also relevant. Absolute Truth cannot be expressed in words. It must be experienced.

And then, in eloquent silence we best reveal that we have awakened to the Dharma.

*This work was transferred from the printed page into electronic medium,
manually, by Rev. Chuan Yi Shakya, OHY.*